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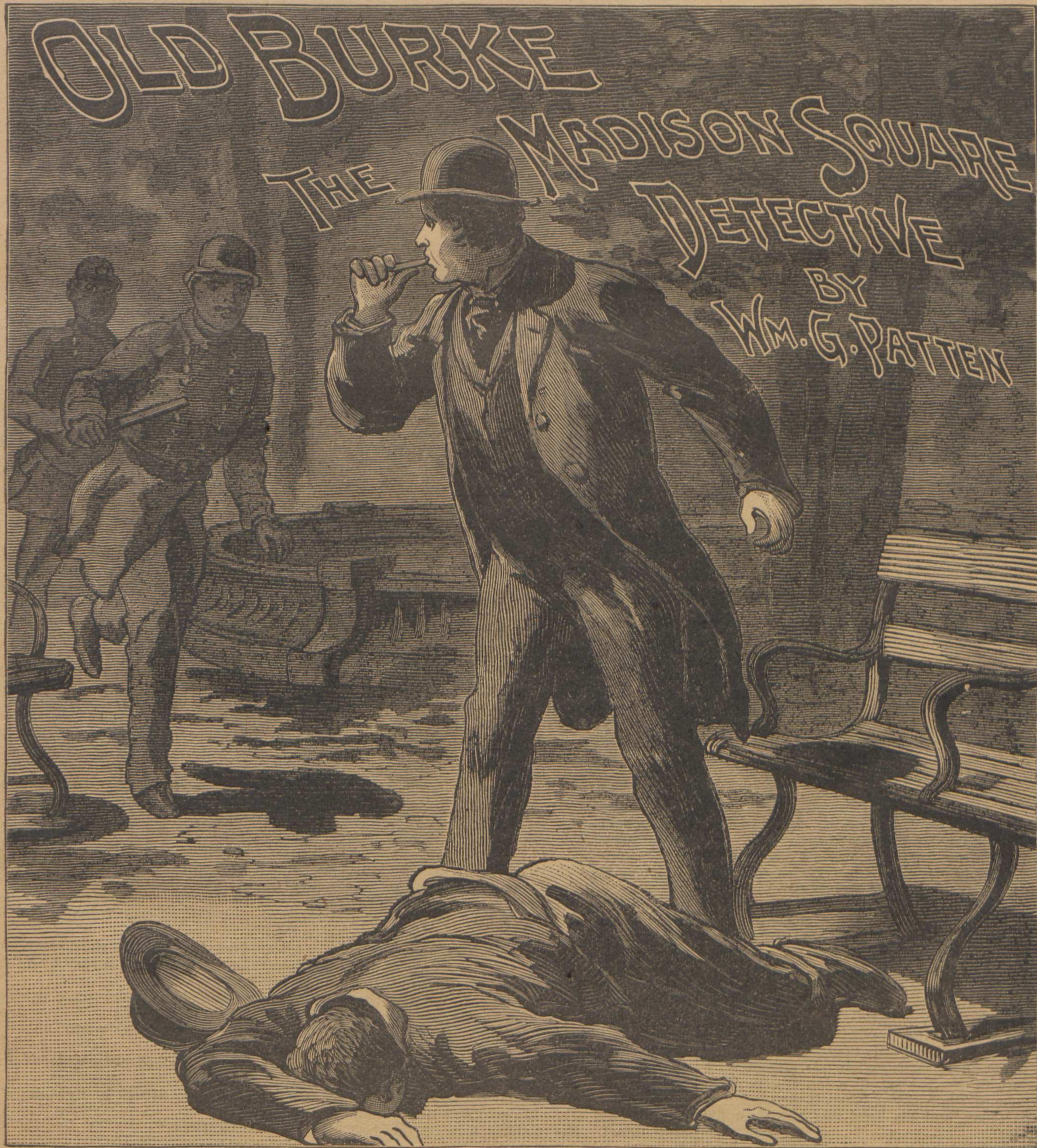
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STRAIGHTENING UP, HE PRODUCED A WHISTLE AND PLACED IT TO HIS LIPS, BLOWING A POLICE CALL FOR ASSISTANCE.

Old Burke,

The Madison Square Detective; OR, The Mystery of the Morgue.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE-VOICE DAN" NOVELS,
"THE GIANT SPORT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEATH IN THE STORM.

MORE than an hour had passed since the city clocks tolled the stroke of midnight. For some time a storm had been threatening, and the greater number of "night owls" who haunt the streets from eight o'clock until daybreak had sought shelter from its approaching fury.

Street cars rolled along Broadway and Twenty-third street, and an occasional cab rumbled hollowly over the stones. The belated pedestrian moved with quickened step, hoping to reach shelter before the storm broke.

The lights about Madison Square shone brightly, but there were patches of black shadows beneath the trees. The leaves had ceased their whispering, and even the fountain seemed to have lost its musical tinkle.

It was the expectant hush before the storm.

Black clouds thrust up their giant shapes in the west, their outlines being revealed by the occasional flashes of lightning which burst from their hearts.

The policeman at the southeast corner of the Square looked up at the lightning-riven clouds and growled.

Three men coming from the East Side, crossed Twenty-third street slowly. The officer, standing in the shadow of the trees, watched them approach.

Two of the men were supporting the third, who seemed very unsteady on his legs. The man on the left carried a small leather grip-sack in his hand.

The man on the right appeared to be angry and excited.

"You hadn't ought to let him get such a cargo aboard, Dave," he scolded.

"I couldn't stop him," replied the one on the other end, protestingly. "When he gets started, he is bound to fill up, and you know it."

"Come, come!" exclaimed the officer, stepping out beneath a lamp. "You fellows want to get a move on if you expect to get under cover before the rain comes. What's the matter with your friend there—loaded?"

"To the muzzle," was the reply.

"Well, hustle him along."

The three moved on and disappeared in the shadows beneath the trees, while the policeman hastily crossed Madison Avenue and sought shelter.

He had not seen the faces of one of the three men with anything like plainness, for they had their hats pulled over their eyes, in view of the near-coming wind, apparently.

A sudden glare of white light filled the street, and then came the crash as of an exploding mine. A rushing, roaring downpour of rain followed instantly.

"Those fellows will get wet," thought the officer, as he watched the pools and rivulets which swiftly formed on the stones of the street and flooded the pavement.

The shower was fierce while it lasted, ragged lightning rending the heavens and rattling bursts of thunder seeming to rock the very earth; but it soon passed, swinging around to the south, where the lightning still played and the thunder boomed sullenly.

The rain had ceased but the leaves of the trees were still dripping and glistening as with pearls, when a man walked briskly across Madison Square, entering by the corner at Madison Avenue and Twenty-Sixth Street and moving toward the Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street corner.

All at once, his attention was attracted by a dark figure that sat in a lopping position on one of the benches beneath the trees. It was a man, and his head was bowed on his breast.

"So full he didn't mind getting a soaking in the rain," muttered the pedestrian.

But something caused him to put a hand on the man's shoulder and give him a shake.

To his astonishment, the figure toppled over on the bench and then rolled to the ground, where it lay without motion.

"What's this?" exclaimed the startled discoverer, as he stooped and touched the unknown's wrist. "Great guns! Dead!"

Straightening up, he produced a whistle and placed it to his lips, blowing a police call for assistance.

In a few moments, two dark figures came running toward him.

"What's up?" asked one of the officers.

"I have a stiff here," was the ready reply.

"Found him under the trees."

One of the policemen bent down and examined the body, while the other seemed keeping suspicious watch of the stranger who had made the ghastly discovery.

"Yes, he is dead," nodded the officer who made the examination. "He was here through the rain."

"Look as if he'd been slugged?" asked the other policeman.

"I don't find any marks."

"Who in blazes are you?" and with the peremptory question, one of the officers suddenly turned on the man who had discovered the corpse.

The one interrogated resented the question, for he incisively retorted:

"You may find out in due time, my man. Just now, I advise you to summon an ambulance."

"I don't want any of your advice, and I think I will take charge of you. You will have to tell what you know about this."

"That's all right," was the calm retort. "My business is not at all pressing, and I want to see Byrnes."

"You'll see Judge Duffy first."

This did not seem to disconcert the stranger in the least.

An ambulance call was sent in, and the policemen had the body removed. The stranger was taken along and was close at hand when the surgeon made an examination. He watched and listened with the air of one who scents a mystery.

"This man must have died of natural causes," declared the surgeon. "I find no trace of a wound."

The stranger's black eyes glittered. Stooping, he lifted one of the corpse's hands.

"Look at this palm," he said, placing the open hand beneath the surgeon's eyes.

The surgeon started.

"Why, it looks as if it were burned!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly," nodded the man of the black eyes. "Examine the other."

It was discovered that the interior of both the dead man's hands seemed blistered and burned in a shocking manner.

"I don't understand this," confessed the young surgeon. "It seems as if he had gripped a live electric wire. Was there such a wire in the vicinity where he was found?"

Both the policemen promptly replied there was not.

Continuing his examination, the surgeon finally decided the unknown came to his death by an electric shock of great severity.

"He was out in the storm," put in one of the policemen.

"And I take it he was struck by lightning," asserted the surgeon, knowingly. "Although I never heard of lightning making such marks as these. It plays queer tricks sometimes, and I fancy this was one of the times."

The man of the black eyes said nothing just then, but there was an odd look on his face. His features were strong and rugged, being unconcealed by beard. His hair had been raven black, but was now tinged with gray at the temples. He was about fifty years of age.

Somehow, there was a strange fascination about his coal-black eyes. It seemed that they possessed a hidden and subtle power—something to be dreaded and feared.

The clothing of the dead man was now examined. It did not seem that any of his personal property had been molested, for there was a well-filled pocketbook within an inner pocket, while his gold watch and chain were intact. His clothing was of the best material and fashionably made.

In the search for some means of identifica-

tion, the police found the name of the tailor on the suit, and also that of the owner.

The latter name was Roscoe Venton.

The tailor's name was James Maur, to which was added Buffalo, New York.

The police seemed to consider the case of small significance. Plainly, Roscoe Venton, probably a business man of Buffalo, had come to New York City and had been killed by lightning on Madison Square.

But, how came he on the Square at that time of night and in a pelting rain-storm?

The officers bothered themselves very little with speculations. When they were about to lock up the man who had discovered the corpse, this person showed them evidence that caused them to change their mind with alacrity.

"I will come around at the proper time and tell what I know," he assured, as he walked out, unrestrained, being showed the greatest respect.

"I thought I knew him," said a roundsman. "He has not been in New York for five years, but I remember the time when Manton Burke was a terror to rogues. He resigned from the force, declaring he had had quite enough of such a life. The last I knew of him he was in England."

"He has a record."

"You are right. Without doubt, he is the most wonderful detective living to-day. He never loses his game once he has even the shadow of a clue. That's how he came to be called Old Deadsure, or Deadsure Burke."

CHAPTER II.

WORK AHEAD.

THE police of Buffalo were immediately notified of the death of the man found in Madison Square, and were asked if Roscoe Venton was a citizen of their city.

Reply came back that Venton was a local druggist, and that he had been missing for three days. A description was also dispatched, and it was found to tally very well with that of the dead man.

Further information was sought and replies received, and the police became confident they had settled the identity of the dead man.

The first caller admitted to see Superintendent Byrnes, in the morning, was Manton Burke, otherwise known as "Old Deadsure," the detective who had discovered the dead man in the Square.

The greatest of New York crook-catchers cordially offered his hand to his visitor, saying:

"I am glad to see you, Burke. I often wondered what you were up to and where you were."

"I have been abroad," replied Burke, "studying the methods of the English and French police, as well as the work of some of their wonderful private detectives."

"I thought you had quite lost interest in anything of the kind."

"Not by any means. I simply gave up the work, but my interest did not end there. I have been gathering materials for a book."

"A book?"

"Yes; about the greatest detectives of the world."

"Do you mean to include your own autobiography?" smiled the genial superintendent.

"Not at all."

"Then your book will be incomplete."

Burke gracefully thanked the other for the honest compliment, for Byrnes is not a man given to foolish flattery. But little time was spent in desultory conversation, as the superintendent's time was valuable, so he soon said:

"I hear you ran on the dead man in Madison Square last night. Struck by lightning, I believe?"

"What reason have you for believing so?"

"Such was the surgeon's report."

"It is not true."

"Eh?" Byrnes looked surprised and interested.

"The man was not struck by lightning."

"What then?"

"He was murdered!"

"Murdered?"

Byrnes knew Burke was not a man to

make an idle or unfounded statement and naturally, his interest was now keenly aroused.

"I haven't a doubt on that point," asserted the veteran detective.

"But, why should you think so?"

"I have several reasons. In the first place, had he been struck by lightning, the marks on his person would have been altogether different. As it is, the palms of his hands seemed seared and scorched—nothing more."

"There is no other wound or mark upon him."

"Perhaps he was poisoned?"

"It is possible. An autopsy will reveal the truth, and that point will soon be settled."

"I scarcely think it will be found he was poisoned, although I believe he was drugged before he entered the Square."

"You usually have reasons for believing anything."

"And I have in this case."

"Would you mind stating them?"

"Not at all. Just before the shower last night, Policeman Callahan happened to be at the corner of Madison avenue and Twenty-third street. As he stood there, three men crossed Twenty-third street and entered the Square. Two of the men seemed sober enough, but they had between them a man whom they were supporting and who appeared deeply intoxicated. One of the sober men carried a small leather grip, and both had their hats pulled down over their eyes. Callahan spoke to them and told them to hurry along, if they wanted to get under cover before it rained. He did not get a good view of their faces, although he says he saw the face of the man they were supporting the plainest."

"And he—"

"Callahan thinks he was the same one I afterward found dead near the center of the Square."

"He thinks so?"

"He is not sure."

"Well, there may be more in this affair than I imagined."

"Something tells me it will prove an important case."

"Don't you want to come back on the force and work it out, Burke?"

"Thank you, sir; but I choose to remain at liberty, although I confess I have taken a fancy to probe this matter. I have a fancy to work it out on my own hook."

"Oh, very well. I shall be forced to put a less competent man on it, if there proves to be anything worth investigating. I have not seen the corpse, but may conclude to look at it, if necessary."

"Here is my present address. I stand ready to give whatever information I possess."

After a few more words, Old Deadsure departed.

An autopsy failed to reveal any trace of deadly poison in the stomach of the dead man, although it was said he had been drinking heavily. The marks on his hands still remained a mystery.

Reports from Buffalo stated Roscoe Venton lived alone with his beautiful daughter, being something of a mystery to his friends and acquaintances. He was supposed to be wealthy, although he was not lavish in his manner of living. His daughter, Doris, was very beautiful, but had been rather zealously guarded and restrained by her parent. Venton was supposed to be a widower.

Early on the morning of the second day after the discovery of the dead man in Madison Square, a young lady, dressed in deep black and closely veiled accompanied by Old Deadsure obtained admittance to the presence of Superintendent Byrnes.

"Sir," said Manton Burke, "this is Miss Doris Venton, daughter of Roscoe Venton."

The veil was lifted revealing a strikingly handsome face, the absorbing feature being a pair of midnight eyes. The girl was not more than eighteen years of age, and there was a frank, fresh air about her that told of an unsullied soul. Plainly her figure was exquisite in contour, and her carriage was natural and graceful, being entirely free from affectation.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed; "I have come to see if it is really true."

Byrnes understood her.

"I fear it is, my dear young lady," he said, soberly. "There is scarcely a doubt."

"I must see the—the—body." She hesitated over the word.

"Just now you need rest. You are excited, and—"

"That is nothing," she quickly put in. "They did not mean to let me come, but I slipped away. It was so horrible I could not bear to be in doubt. Father did not say a word to me about coming here when he left home, and I have worried so. And then to hear this—it was dreadful!"

It was useless to attempt to persuade her to rest before viewing the body, so the superintendent called up one of his men.

"Cable," he said, "you will accompany Miss Venton to the Morgue. You are to look after her carefully. If she makes an identification, I must see her again."

Cable understood he was to watch the girl closely to see she did nothing desperate in case she recognized the dead man as her father.

Manton Burke remained in the background after securing Doris Venton's admission to Byrnes's office, where she had been determined to come, but he fully intended going along with her to the Morgue. A queer look passed over his face when Cable was called up and Doris Venton placed in his charge, but he said nothing.

Away to the ghastly house of death went the trio, Cable shooting Old Deadsure a glance that spoke volumes. Years before, while working together on the force, they had become enemies, and never a word had been exchanged between them since.

The girl seemed brave and determined, but Manton Burke was prepared for anything that might occur, knowing a woman's nature as well, in all probability, as any man living.

At the Morgue Cable spoke a few low words to an official, and they were shown to a spot where they could peer through a grating at a rigid body stretched on a marble slab.

Burke was watching Doris Venton closely, ready to catch her should she show signs of swooning. She had lifted her vail, and mingled with the deep look of horror on her handsome face was a look of unshaken resolution.

"This is the one," said Cable—"this is the man found in Madison Square."

Manton Burke saw a sudden dawning of hope in the face he was watching.

"Is it true?" asked the girl, of him—"is this the man?"

"It is," he replied.

"Thank God!" she cried, chokingly.

"Thank God!"

Both detectives were startled.

"Then he is not your father?" questioned Burke.

"No! That is not the body of my father!"

She caught at his arm, and he supported her.

"Take me out!" she whispered. "My strength—is—going!"

Both men assisted her to the open air.

Old Deadsure suddenly realized he had struck a genuine mystery.

The next move, which rather strangely had been reserved to follow the identification of the body, was the examination of the dead man's clothes and private possessions found on his person.

Doris revived as soon as she reached the open air, and she was so overjoyed she was soon strong enough to make the examination necessary.

Then came another surprise.

She identified the clothing, the watch, the pocketbook, and several minor articles, as belonging to her father. Of this she was positive.

Burke's lips were pressed firmly together and his nostrils dilated.

He scented work ahead—keen work—subtle work!

CHAPTER III.

OLD DEADSURE MAKES NOTES.

Quite naturally there was a mild sensation in police circles, for it had been thought the dead man would be readily identified as the missing Buffalo druggist, but the beautiful daughter of the druggist positively de-

clared that he was not her father, although she confessed there was a similarity of appearance, the dead man's beard being trimmed exactly as she remembered her parent's.

And still she identified the clothes worn by the man as belonging to her father!

When Superintendent Byrnes heard of this his interest in the case was immediately increased, for he began to see it was of importance, and he had the girl brought to his office again, where he questioned her closely.

Old Deadsure waited outside in a cab, and when Doris left New York's greatest detective, Manton Burke accompanied her to the hotel where she had decided to stop.

Within a private room, he also questioned her concerning her father.

"You say he went away without letting you know about it?"

"Yes."

"Was such a thing common?"

"It never occurred before."

"Has your father any enemies?"

"Not one in the world that I know of, sir."

"Was he odd or peculiar in any way?"

Doris hesitated a moment, and then she frankly replied:

"I think he was, Mr. Burke. He was rather grave and moody at times. He was a great student, and I have fancied his studies were wearing on him."

Deadsure was making notes.

"I am greatly interested in this singular case," he declared, interrupting himself in the midst of his questioning; "and I mean to solve this mystery. I am not on the regular police force, but am a kind of freelance. For that reason, I may be able to work it out all the more rapidly, as I will have nothing to hamper me, and I can work exactly as I please."

"Oh, if you can discover what has happened to my poor father, you shall be rewarded—"

He stopped her with a gesture and a look from those black eyes.

"We won't speak of that now," he said.

"If I were on the regular force, you would have to pay a stated sum for my service. As it is, I am at liberty to receive pay or decline it, as I choose."

She bowed.

"Now, will you be kind enough to tell me of any marked peculiarities of your father, Miss Venton?"

"After a few moments' thought, the girl replied.

"The most peculiar thing I can think of just now is that he read a certain work of fiction so many times and carried it about with him so much that he wore out several volumes. In fact, I have seen him brooding over that book in the most remarkable manner.

"What was the book?"

"Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.'"

"Rather an odd book for a druggist to be so absorbed in."

"That is true."

"Was he given to the reading of fiction?"

"Not at all. I have often wondered how he came to read Stevenson's book. He once stated that the idea of a man having two personalities and being able to change from one to another by means of some chemical agent was not so impossible as most people might imagine."

Manton Burke made a note.

"Was your father inclined to dabble in chemicals by the way of experimenting?"

"That I do not know. He had a little back room in his store, and to this room I was never admitted. What he kept there I do not know."

"Was he in the habit of staying in this room much?"

"He sometimes stayed there until nearly morning."

There was a strange sparkle in the detective's eyes.

"Do you know if any of your father's family were inclined to mental afflictions?"

Again the girl hesitated, but she finally replied:

"I believe he had a brother who died in a mad-house."

Another note by Old Deadsure.

The detective asked many more questions,

and then, seeing the girl was quite exhausted, left her, stating he would return later.

Back to the Morgue he went, and there he made an examination of the mysterious corpse.

He was not long in discovering on the left breast a peculiar birthmark that looked like an open human eye.

An exclamation of amazement broke from his lips, and he stood staring hard into the face of the corpse.

"Is it possible?" he muttered. "Why, Byrnes has not recognized the man! The face is not that of Tom Buck, but this mark—well, it is scarcely probable two men should be so marked."

After some moments of silence, he said, mentally.

"Buck had peculiar upper teeth, by which he was readily identified. This man's teeth are false. If it is possible he is Buck, it shows he was shrewd enough to get rid of those teeth. Then Buck's nose was bent and broken, while this man's nose seems all right. But the mark—the mark!"

In his pocket he had a full and complete description of the man he had found dead in Madison Square, although, strangely enough, the birthmark had not been spoken of as resembling a human eye.

After a little time, he proceeded from the Morgue to the Rogues' Gallery, where he searched among the pictures until he came to a certain number, beneath which was the name "Tom Buck." The description followed, and he compared it with the description of the mysterious corpse.

It agreed in many particulars, such as height and general dimensions.

He stood and studied the beardless face represented in the photograph. In some respects it was an ugly countenance, but its chief repulsiveness arose from the projecting upper teeth and the broken nose. With good teeth, a perfect nose and a neatly trimmed beard, Buck might have looked like the man found dead in Madison Square.

"The next thing I want is a picture of Roscoe Venton," thought Old Deadsure.

He resolved to see Byrnes before going up-town again, and he was able to do so, after waiting more than half an hour.

"What became of Crook-nose Tom Buck?" was Manton Burke's question.

"He is dead."

"When did he die?"

"Three years ago."

"Where?"

"In New Mexico. He was killed."

"Killed?"

"Yes. You know he had a hand in the great Bank of Empire robbery."

Old Deadsure nodded.

"One of my men ran him into New Mexico and was about to rake him in when he got into a saloon brawl and was shot through the heart."

"There is no doubt about this?"

"Not the least. Why do you ask?"

"I fancied I had seen Buck in New York. You have not removed his picture from your collection."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't know. For a time I did have doubt about Buck's death—thought it might be a fake you know; but I have become convinced it actually occurred. I think I will have his picture removed."

"Who was the man who followed him into New Mexico?"

"Jack Cable."

Deadsure whistled softly.

"I'd like to have a talk with him."

"Just now he is out."

Manton Burke met Jack Cable on the steps, just as he was leaving the building. To Cable's astonishment, Old Deadsure paused and spoke to him.

"Cable, do you mind giving me a tip?"

"Not if it is of no particular importance to me," replied the regular, somewhat stiffly.

"I believe you tracked Tom Buck into New Mexico?"

"That's right."

"He was killed there?"

"Sure."

"Did you see him after he was shot?"

"Yes."

"There was no doubt about it being Buck?"

"Not the least, sir."

"You made a thorough examination of the corpse?"

"Yes."

"You are willing to swear it was Buck?"

"On a stack of Bibles."

Cable's face was flushed and he was growing crusty, which warned Deadsure he had obtained all the information the regular would be likely to impart, so he expressed his thanks and passed on.

"I don't really see a great deal of light on this mystery," he confessed to himself. "It is really growing more and more complicated."

And with the deepening of the mystery his interest was increasing.

At about three in the afternoon he returned to the hotel where Doris Venton was stopping, and sent up his card. She was ready to receive him.

"Have you any news?" she eagerly cried.

Her disappointment was great when she found he could tell her nothing of her father.

A few moments after the appearance of Manton the girl received another card. Her face paled as she read the name upon it.

"Why has he followed me here?" she cried. When she was calmer, she said the gentleman might come up.

"Then I will retire," said Deadsure.

"By no means!" she quickly exclaimed. "I do not wish to be left alone with the gentleman. He has followed me from Buffalo. I slipped away without allowing him to know anything of it. He is Walter Fielding, my cousin."

CHAPTER IV.

DOUBTS.

FIELDING soon appeared. He was a tall and rather handsome fellow, being dressed with the greatest care and elegance and carrying a tasty walking-stick. From his glossy tie to his patent leather shoes he was immaculate.

"My dear Doris!" he cried, with an affected accent that was supposed to be "deucedly English, you know." "What evaw made you run away? I really don't see how you could do such a thing—I really don't! It is so horribly unconventional don't yaw know."

"I came to New York to learn the truth about my father," was the girl's firm reply.

"But you really know I was ready to come myself. You should have left such beastly unpleasant things to me. If I had imagined you were bound to come, I would have accompanied you, don't yaw know."

"I am quite able to take care of myself, Walt. Allow me to present you to Mr. Manton Burke. Mr. Burke, Mr. Fielding, my cousin."

Fielding made a short bow and then stared hard at the detective. Old Deadsure expected to see the fellow screw a glass into his eye, but he was disappointed.

"Aw! Hawyer. Unexpected pleasure."

This recognition was characteristic of the American fop who tries to ape English manners, and Manton Burke refrained from smiling with difficulty. Fielding did not appear like a consumptive, cigarette-smoking dude, having a well-knit and graceful figure, while the color of health was in his cheeks.

"I've had a horrible time finding you, Doris," he declared, turning again to the girl. "Police down at Headquarters told me where you were, aftaw I convinced them of my own identity. Deucedly unpleasant to hawve to mingle with such people, don't yaw know."

"There was no reason in the world for doing so. I would have returned home in due time."

"It is plain you have little idea of the possible perils you may run into in New York. It is a bad place for a young lady to be in alone."

"You are altogether too solicitous for my welfare, Walt! I am really getting weary of it."

"Your father requested me to look aftaw you. By the way, have you learned anything about Uncle Roscoe?"

"The dead man is not my father."

"Really?"

"But he was wearing father's clothes, had all his papers, and carried his watch."

"Well, really!"

Fielding showed his astonishment by an uplifting of the eyebrows.

"This is surprising, don't yaw know!"

How did the fellow ever come to have those things?"

"That is a mystery. It seems that something terrible must have happened to poor father, but I have hopes to find him still alive."

"Hawve you put the beastly police to searching for him?"

"This gentleman is a detective who is at work on the case."

Again Fielding favored Old Deadsure with a stare.

"He really looks sharp, don't yaw know," observed Walt, with the utmost coolness.

"I believe I approve of him."

Manton coughed and lifted his hand to his face. Walt was certainly proving amusing.

Doris looked confused, and the detective sought to relieve her embarrassment by saying:

"I am happy to meet with your approval. I trust we may be able to get at the bottom of this mystery in a very short time."

At this, Fielding approached the detective and held out his hand, which Deadsure accepted.

"I shall be happy to render any assistance possible, don't yaw know."

When Manton Burke left the hotel, Walt Fielding accompanied him, and the two entered a cab at the door. Fielding had expressed a desire to visit the Morgue and view the body of the unknown man, and the detective wished to question him some. There was a good opportunity for asking questions concerning the vanished druggist during the trip down town, and Manton made the most of it.

The young man from Buffalo agreed with all Doris had told of her father, adding very little of importance.

"Were you ever in the little back room at Mr. Venton's store?" questioned the detective.

"Yes, once."

"What did you see there?"

"Nothing but a complete apparatus for making chemical experiments."

"Was Venton a popular man in Buffalo?"

"Deucedly unpopular, sir."

"Ah?"

"Always seemed in a blue study, don't yaw know. Sometimes failed to speak to his best acquaintances when he met them on the street. Was called a crank. Some even said he was deranged."

"Did any one know where he was going when he disappeared several days ago?"

Fielding hesitated a moment, then slowly replied:

"Not that I am aware of."

Somehow, Manton was not quite satisfied with the answer, but he passed on from that point to the next.

"Has he ever disappeared in this manner before?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you know of this strange infatuation for the book called 'Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'?"

"Yes. It was a most singular thing, by Jove! He was forever carrying around a copy of that yarn. Why, he even said to me once that he believed the Jekyll and Hyde trick was not such an impossibility as people supposed. I really believe he was cracked over the book, don't yaw know."

"Isn't it possible he may have been trying some Jekyll and Hyde experiment in the little back room of the store?"

"Quite possible."

"I must obtain a photograph of him."

"I have brought one with me."

Fielding produced a cabinet photograph from his pocket and passed it to the detective. Old Deadsure examined the picture closely, finally observing:

"His features are remarkably like those of the dead man at the Morgue, but Miss Venton positively asserts that man is not her father."

As they were entering the Morgue, Fielding gave a start and an exclamation that attracted Manton's attention to the fact that he was staring hard at a young man who was just coming out. The stranger was also tall and handsome and wore a blonde mustache. He looked up and saw Walt.

"Fielding, is it you?" he exclaimed, coming quickly forward. "What is this I hear about Mr. Venton's disappearance?"

Walt had drawn himself up stiffly.

"Sir," he retorted, haughtily, "I do not care to make any conversation with you."

The stranger's face flushed.

"Don't be a fool, Walt!" he exclaimed. "Let's forget we are enemies—for a time at least."

"I do not forget so easily. I want nothing to do with you."

Fielding passed on.

The other stood watching him a moment, then turned and walked away.

"Curse his impudence!" growled Walt. "The idea of his speaking to me! It is really beastly, don't yaw know!"

"Who is he?"

"Calls himself Frank Howland. Nobody knows if that is really his name. Came to Buffalo a little more than a year ago. Had money, but preferred to work. Beastly low taste! I thought he was quite a fellow, but was taken in, don't yaw see. We had trouble."

"About what, may I ask?"

Fielding hesitated some moments, then replied:

"About Miss Doris, my cousin. The fellow really tried to make love to her."

"And you resented it?"

"I did, sir."

"Did Miss Venton care for him?"

"She seemed to have a foolish liking for the fellow. You know she's nothing but a child—she needs protection—I am an orphan, sir, and I live with my uncle, Mr. Venton. He has chawged me many times to look aftaw Doris, and I consider it my duty to do so, even though she may not like it."

"Which is quite commendable."

"I remembaw now of hearing some conversation between Mr. Venton and this man Howland. I think he had asked for Miss Doris's hand. Uncle Roscoe seemed excited and angry, and he declared he would come to New York and hunt up Howland's record. You see, Howland claimed to come from New York, and he was in the habit of making frequent visits here."

"When was it you overheard this conversation?"

"About two weeks ago. Howland disappeared directly after, and he has not been seen in Buffalo since."

Manton whipped out his book and made some notes, for he fancied he might find this information of importance.

Then they entered and viewed the body of the mysterious dead man, the detective watching his companion closely all the while.

At first Fielding gave a great start of surprise, and then he bent forward and scanned the corpse narrowly. That he was startled was plainly evident.

"This does not seem to be Uncle Roscoe," he said, slowly; "and yet—"

He paused.

"And yet what?" questioned Old Deadsure.

"It is remarkably like him. At first, I thought it must surely be him; but now—"

"But now?"

"I don't know what to think."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

FOR once in his life, at least, Old Deadsure was thoroughly puzzled. Walt Fielding was something of a mystery to the great detective, who, however, was certain the fellow knew many things which would be of importance in working out the strange case.

There was little doubt about the genuineness of Fielding's astonishment and doubt concerning the dead man, but just what that astonishment meant was more than Manton Burke could tell at that moment.

After some moments, Fielding reached into his pocket and produced the cabinet photograph of Roscoe Venton, which he studied closely, looking from the picture to the face of the corpse, as if making a comparison.

"What do you make of it?" Old Deadsure questioned.

"Not a blooming thing. I'm completely knocked, don't yaw know. It doesn't seem possible this man can be Uncle Roscoe, but I can see a great likeness."

Manton again secured the picture, and he

was able to see a strong resemblance between the photographed face and that of the dead man, but there was enough difference to make a distinction.

"It is a remarkable thing that the men should look so very much alike and one be found wearing the clothes of the other," he admitted, "but this is not Mr. Venton, for all that."

Fielding made no reply, and the two men soon left the grisly house of death.

The detective had asked to retain the photograph of Roscoe Venton, and had been allowed to do so. Walt declaring he had no further use for it.

Back to the hotel where Doris was staying went the ferret, Fielding accompanying him. When the elevator came down, Jack Cable, the police detective, stepped out.

"That fellow is sticking close about here," thought Manton.

He was obliged to inform Fielding he wished to see Miss Venton in private, otherwise, the young man would have accompanied him to the girl's room.

Old Deadsure did not spend many minutes with Doris, for he had decided on an important move, and he simply saw her for the purpose of warning her against talking too freely, unless it should be to some one she knew connected with the regular police force. He also told her she might not see him for two days, but he advised her to remain where she was until he returned or she learned something definite about her father.

Within another hour, an Express train was bearing Manton Burke toward Buffalo.

The detective found time to eat and sleep on the train, and he seemed as fresh as a lark when he arrived at his destination. With the forenoon of another day he was at work gathering facts concerning Roscoe Venton, recording everything he fancied might prove of importance.

He worked swiftly, for he felt that he had no time to lose. He was becoming more and more impressed with the belief that he had struck a great case—one that would demand his utmost skill to fathom.

Again and again the thought came to him that the dead man was, after all, the missing Buffalo druggist. How this could be he could not exactly understand, and he was not willing to accept it as the truth.

Then he would be troubled with thoughts of Tom Buck.

Was it possible Roscoe Venton and the disappeared criminal were one and the same?

Cable professed to have seen Burke cold and dead, but Old Deadsure put very little confidence in the word of the police ferret. Cable had been quite out of his element as the tracker of a criminal in the wilds of the Southwest, and he might have failed utterly in running down his man. In that case, what was easier than to return and report Buck dead?

Finding himself thus reported, the criminal might have resolved to lead an honest life. Some attraction had drawn him back to Buffalo, which was as near New York as he dared venture.

But Buck and Venton did not look in the least alike.

However, when he came to think this over, he was not so certain on that point. With a perfect nose and good teeth, Tom Buck might have grown a beard, and thus quite changed his appearance.

This idea haunted him constantly, despite the fact that he could not account for Buck having a beautiful and refined daughter like Doris.

Something that made the possibility of the criminal and the druggist being one seem all the more a probability was the missing man's strange infatuation for the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which one man, by the aid of a subtle drug, is able to transform himself at will into a creature quite unlike his natural self. The druggist had clung to the book and read it until he wore out seven copies.

And the back room in his little shop, where he was said to spend so much of his time.

What had he been doing there?

And then his statement to Doris that the story of Jekyll and Hyde was not such an absurd impossibility as nearly every one believed!

To the druggist's store went the detective. The place was being kept open by Roscoe Venton's clerk, a young fellow with a bang and an air of utter languor. At first this person was not inclined to answer the questions put to him by Old Deadsure.

"I am tired of talking about Mr. Venton," he declared, in disgust. "Everybody who knows him and about two hundred who do not know him have been bothering the life out of me. I have laid down a rule not to say another thing about him, and I do not propose to break that rule for the President."

"You need not break it for the President," said Manton Burke quite suavely: "but you will break it for me."

"I'm hanged if I do!" retorted the young man, his face flushing with anger.

"Then you will be hanged."

Old Deadsure fixed his dark eyes on the orbs of the youthful clerk, seeming to throw a strange force into his gaze, which was unwavering and piercing.

The owner of the bang began to stammer, but he suddenly stopped, his eyes seemingly chained on those of the detective. A strange look settled on the face of the clerk, and his lips parted slightly.

"I think you will answer my questions now?" said Manton.

The other nodded.

"Good!" came from the detective's lips. "Now, I want to know if Mr. Venton spoke of going away before his disappearance?"

"Not to me, sir."

"Was he a man peculiar in his ways?"

"Decidedly so."

"Have you ever entered the private room at the back of the store?"

"A few times."

"Can you do so now?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to take me there."

The clerk hesitated, but the power of the detective's gaze seemed to force him to obey, despite his wish to do otherwise. Closing and locking the outer door, he led the way to the little back room, which he entered by means of a skeleton key.

"Where did you get that key?" asked Manton.

"I—I made it, sir."

"Did Mr. Venton know you had it?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you wish to enter this room?"

"I believed Mr. Venton had some wonderful secret concealed here, and I wanted to discover what it was."

"Did you discover anything?"

"Nothing but what you see."

Looking around him, Manton saw many arrangements for making chemical experiments, but a thorough investigation revealed nothing more. He was somewhat disappointed, and still he knew not why he should be.

Returning to the front of the store, he plied the clerk with questions, obtaining all the information he could from that quarter, yet failing to secure anything he really thought of great importance.

Having released the clerk from the spell he had cast over him, he at once proceeded to the nearest telegraph office, from which he sent a dispatch to Police Headquarters in New York.

He already knew the teeth of the dead man he had found in Madison Square were false, but there was another point he wished to settle, and his dispatch read as follows:

"If the man at first supposed to be Roscoe Venton has not been buried, please have a thorough examination of his nose made by a surgeon who can tell if that member has ever been broken."

"He spent as much time in Buffalo as he dared, knowing every minute was precious and feeling that he ought to be in New York."

It happened that the ticket-seller at the New York Central Railway station was acquainted with Roscoe Venton, and from him Old Deadsure learned a ticket to New York had been sold the missing druggist on the day of his disappearance.

Did Venton reach New York?

That was the question that remained to be answered.

Feeling something drawing him to the metropolis, Manton Burke decided to return without delay, and he took the first train.

Happening to fall into conversation with

the conductor, that gentleman, purely by chance, mentioned the strange case of the vanished druggist, saying he had been reading something about it in some paper.

"Do you know," he said. "I believe the man went through on my train."

The detective was interested in an instant.

"What makes you think so?" he asked.

"Well," on the very day he is said to have disappeared from Buffalo, an odd-appearing individual stopped me as I was passing his seat and asked me if I thought it possible for a human being to utterly change his character and personal appearance by means of a drug. He had a strange look in his eyes, and I fancied him slightly daft. Without waiting for me to answer his question, he declared he was a druggist and fully believed he had discovered a means whereby he could become a person so utterly unlike himself that not even his best friends would recognize him.

"Now," continued the conductor, "this Venton was a druggist, and I fancy he may have been the very person who made such a silly statement. If so, he had, without doubt, gone crazy, which accounts for his singular disappearance. I have read descriptions of Venton, and, as well as I remember, they are suited to my odd passenger."

Old Deadsure repressed his intense satisfaction, saying carelessly:

"I reckon it was Venton."

"If so, his head had been turned by the book he was reading."

"What book was that?"

"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

CHAPTER VI.

OLD DEADSURE'S FATE.

MANTON BURKE felt that he was now on the trail, without a doubt.

"Did you notice Venton after your talk with him?" he asked.

"Yes," nodded the conductor; "my interest was aroused, and I noticed him each time I passed through the car. He was finally joined by another man."

"You interest me."

"I could not have failed to notice them then, for this other was almost the exact double of Venton, if it was Venton I spoke with."

It is needless to say the detective's interest was now at the highest pitch.

"A double, eh? That was singular."

"I thought so," agreed the conductor, "and I took a fancy to watch the men."

"Did they seem like old acquaintances?"

"On the contrary, I am sure they met quite by chance."

"But they grew friendly?"

"Very."

"Both went through to New York?"

"Yes; and they left the car together at the Grand Central."

This was information of value to Manton Burke, for it now seemed that Roscoe Venton had surely reached New York City. Not only that, but he had a companion when he left the train.

And that companion was an almost perfect double of the Buffalo druggist!

Burke thought of the dead man he had found in Madison Square. In many respects he resembled the missing druggist.

Was this the man who joined Venton during the journey?

"The sun bothered them," continued the conductor, "and they changed their seats to the shady side of the car, going further forward. It was after they did so that I picked a scrap of paper from beneath the seat where they had sat. Something led me to preserve it, although I know not why I did so."

He took a little leather case from his pocket, and from this he extracted a ragged piece of manilla-colored paper, which the detective instantly saw was part of a telegraph blank. Unfolding the paper, the conductor allowed Old Deadsure to examine it. It had been torn in two in the middle, one half being missing.

These broken sentences are what Manton read.

"—will meet you, as agreed. You are forgott—
No danger. Don't— come to your terms. McG."

It was difficult to estimate the importance of the find, for it might not be in any way

connected with the two men; but Manton realized there was a chance that it was of value.

"Look here," he said, speaking in a low tone, "I am a detective, and I am engaged on this very case. See." He opened his coat enough to show his badge.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the conductor. "I didn't imagine—"

"Never mind," nodded Manton, checking the other's speech.

"It is not my custom to give myself away, but I want this slip of paper. There is no telling how much it may be worth."

"You are welcome to it, for I am sure it is of no value to me."

"Thank you. I can trust you to say nothing about this?"

"You can."

The stopping of the train at a station caused the conductor to leave Manton, and the detective fell to studying over the mutilated dispatch. He was soon able to supply missing words to make sense, put he was not sure it made the sense of the original. In fact, he was certain some things had been omitted.

"I will meet you, as agreed. You are forgotten here. No danger. Don't fail to come. I will come to your terms. McG."

The italicized letters and words are those supplied by the detective. The dispatch now made good sense, but the length of the lines was not satisfactory. However, to supply more words would be to carry the speculation still further, which was unsatisfactory, to say the very least.

While he was studying over the fragment of the dispatch Manton noticed a gray-bearded man who sat down opposite him, the two seats being facing. Although he seemed not to pay the slightest heed, the detective observed the old fellow eying him keenly, and that was quite enough to put Manton on the alert.

After a time, the detective carefully folded the scrap of paper and put it into an inner pocket for safety.

Then the gray-bearded man ventured to lean forward and touch Manton on the knee.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Don't mention it," nodded the detective.

"Are you going to New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you familiar with the place?"

"Somewhat."

"Do you know anything of the firm of Julius Braem & Co.?"

"Can't say I do."

"I'm sorry," declared the old man. "You see, it's like this," and he grew confidential. "I have a boy that works for them. It's on Centre street. He doesn't know I'm coming. I'm goin' to give him a surprise. He's a smart boy, but he thinks his old dad don't know enough to git around in New York, and I want to show him he's inistaken. I'm no chump, if I did come from Indiana—no, sir. Still, I don't keer if I get a tip how to reach Julius Braem & Co. I want to give Johnny a surprise by walking right in on him. He'll come nigh fallin' dead." The old gentleman ended with a chuckling laugh, nudging himself in the ribs with his thumb, as if thoroughly delighted with the prospect of giving Johnny a surprise.

But Manton was suspicious, for there was something insincere about the stranger, and the detective fancied he smelled a game of some sort.

In a short time, the two men were talking and laughing freely, evidently on the most friendly terms so far as chance acquaintance could place them.

"My boy's a smart 'un," nodded the gray-beard. "Set out to make a way fer himself when he was eighteen, and he took to New York as a duck takes to water. There hain't many boys as could do it, I tell you! And I remember the times I have taken him out back of the barn and larruped him till my arm was tired. Just now he'd be able to larrup me."

"That's the way it goes," agreed the detective, who was studying the other closely, although not appearing to do so. "Time is bound to knock us all out and give our places to the young men."

This seemed to make the man from Indiana sad, and he produced a handkerchief in order to blow his nose vigorously.

"I hain't what I uster was," he mumbled.

"Why, there was a time when I could hold up my end with the best of 'em. I was one of the hard nuts in my day, though ye might not think it to look at me now."

Manton nodded. He had made a discovery.

The stranger's gray beard was false!

There was no longer a doubt but the man was working some kind of a game.

The detective laughed inwardly.

"He ought to know better than to try that on me," he thought. "I wonder where his confederate is?"

But he took good care not to allow the other to know his suspicions were aroused.

For a long time they chatted.

At length, the old fellow produced some cigars, offering one to the detective.

"We cannot smoke here," said Manton.

The disguised man proposed the smoking car, and they made their way thither, the detective taking care to exchange the cigar for one of his own, as they passed from car to car.

He fancied the weed might be drugged.

Night had come on, but Manton had no thought of seeking a respite in sleep during this trip, for something told him he had enemies around him.

It would be long after midnight when New York was reached, but Old Deadsure would not close his eyes for an instant.

He knew that there was danger whenever he was troubled with the sensation that now oppressed him.

In the smoking-car he enjoyed his cigar, knowing he was quite safe in smoking one of his own purchase.

The disguised man watched the detective closely, although he did not seem to do so, and they continued talking of various things. Manton could not fail to see something of wonder in the eyes of his companion, and he knew the other was astonished because the cigar failed to affect him in any way.

The train boy brought along some afternoon papers, and both men purchased a copy.

In glancing over the paper, Manton soon struck an item that riveted his attention. It was headed: "Another Mysterious Disappearance." Briefly it went on to state that the daughter of the Buffalo druggist, who had so strangely disappeared, had, like her father, vanished completely, and no trace of her could be found.

Suppressing his feelings, the detective read the item over again.

Doris Venton had vanished.

What did it mean?

Was there a plot, a conspiracy against Venton, and had the girl been kidnapped in order to carry out the dastardly scheme?

He could not help feeling that something of the kind was true.

Manton had enough to keep him thinking for a long time, and his companion did not speak all the while.

At length, the other announced his intention of taking a nap, and lay back in the corner of his seat, apparently becoming unconscious of his surroundings in a short time.

But Old Deadsure well knew he was being watched all the while by the apparently sleeping man. However, this did not trouble the detective at all.

No move was made, and the hours slipped by until the tunnel just outside the Grand Central Depot was reached.

Still, the disguised man seemed sleeping.

"I wonder if he will follow," thought Manton, as he arose and started to leave the car.

The other stirred, yawned, started up, exclaiming:

"Hello! hello! Where are we?"

And then he started after the detective.

Old Deadsure laughed to himself, and when he reached the end of the car, he paused to look in the mirror there, carefully arranging his hair. In this way, he gave the other time enough to come up.

Then he opened the door and held it for the disguised man to step out in advance.

This the man from Indiana did not hesitate to do.

The train was bowling through the tunnel, occasional lights flashing past on either side.

Within five minutes the Grand Central would be reached.

Old Deadsure followed the disguised man from the smoker.

The moment he reached the smoker and closed the door behind him, he felt himself suddenly grasped from behind by a pair of strong arms.

At the same instant the man in advance wheeled upon him, hissing savagely:

"So you wouldn't smoke the cigar! Well, we'll fix you, anyway!"

Manton knew it was to be a struggle for life against desperate odds, and he made a fierce attempt to break from the arms which held him.

In this he was partially successful.

Then, just as the disguised man flung himself forward, the detective snatched the false beard from his enemy's face.

The flash of a passing light, added to the light from the cars, showed him the countenance thus exposed, and he recognized it, despite the fact he had not seen the man in more than five years.

"Ben McGath!" he cried.

"Curse ye!" grated the desperado. "You know me, but little good will that knowledge ever do you! Cast him over, pal!"

Then both the detective's foes sought to hurl him from the train.

Manton Burke fought with all his strength, for he felt that to be hurled from the platform while they were in the tunnel would mean instant death, as there was barely room for the train to pass along.

But he had been taken at a disadvantage, and he felt himself steadily and surely forced toward the steps. He could see the stone walls of the tunnel flying past, the car lights gleaming upon the rough surface. Powerful man though he was, he had two foes to deal with, both of whom were strong and desperate.

He set his teeth, and not a cry came from his lips. He did not mean to be conquered, but his foot slipped suddenly, and the next instant he was hurled headlong from the platform!

The two men left behind looked into each other's faces.

"Old Deadsure has failed this time," said one.

"He will never trouble us again," declared the other. "By this time he has been mangled and torn beneath the wheels. I doubt if there will be enough of him left to know it was a man."

"I have wiped out an old score."

And their hearts were filled with devilish exultation.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW MANTON ESCAPED.

WHEN he found himself falling from the moving train, Manton Burke fully believed his life would shortly end beneath the wheels of the cars.

He felt it was impossible to escape death then.

Down he went, expecting to strike against the solid wall of stone and be dashed back beneath the wheels.

He struck!

The shock was so great he was stunned for the time, but he was not hurled back to meet death under the train.

Realizing he had not been touched by the wheels, he lay quite still, listening to the roar of the passing train and wondering how it was he was spared.

He did not feel any pain, only seeming to be dazed from the great shock of the fall.

The train had been moving at slackened speed at the time he was hurled from the platform, which accounts for the shock failing to utterly deprive him of consciousness.

Knowing nothing of his surroundings, Old Deadsure did not dare move a muscle as long as the train was passing, thinking it possible such a move would be fatal.

It seemed that the cars were hours in passing, but the last one finally rolled on toward the Grand Central Depot.

Then Manton Burke sat up and felt of his body and his limbs, making sure he was all there. He moved cautiously at first, for he did not know but some of his limbs might have been broken, yet so benumbed by the shock that he did not know it.

With a feeling of untold relief and wonder,

he discovered he was not harmed in any manner.

Then he began to examine his surroundings. In a few moments he discovered how his remarkable escape had come about.

At that point there was an opening between the two tracks, one of which is used for incoming and the other for outgoing trains. By a rare stroke of fortune, he had been cast into this opening, and thus he had fallen beyond reach of the iron wheels.

Old Deadsure was not a praying man, but it almost seemed that his life had been spared by a kind Providence, and he was inclined to give thanks then, although he had passed through many hair-breadth escapes from death.

Even as he was thinking of this, a train passed him on either hand, one going one way and the opposite going the other.

Crouching in the opening, he watched the lighted windows fluttering past, in nearly every one of which he discerned the outlines of a human head.

In a few seconds the trains were gone, and he was alone in the tunnel once more.

How was he to get out of the tunnel?

That was a question not easily answered, for he knew trains were constantly passing in and out on either track, and if he left the opening that now gave him shelter, he might be caught by one of those trains and killed.

Still, he must get out some way.

While trying to think of some means of escape, a question began to trouble him.

Why had he been attacked and cast from the train?

To be sure, Ben McGath—sometimes called "Baltimore Ben"—had once been captured and sent up through Old Deadsure's efforts; but that was long years before, and the detective did not believe Ben had resorted to such desperate measures in order to get square.

There was something behind the assault upon him—something more than a desire for revenge.

In that case either the crook feared him or he had been hired by other parties to put him out of the way.

Which was the truth?

A sudden thought came to him.

The mutilated telegram obtained from the conductor!

It was signed "McG."

And that signature might stand for "McGath."

"I believe that is the truth," muttered the detective, with strong conviction. "In that case, Ben McGath is in some way connected with this Venton affair! It must be! This adventure has, at least, given me something to work on; and Baltimore Ben will, for a time, believe me dead. That will make it all the better for me."

"But, who was his comrade—the man who grasped me behind? The fellow was wonderfully strong."

While he was thinking this matter over, several trains passed on either hand. He grew impatient and desperate, feeling that he was losing time.

Finally, he decided on a desperate course. Waiting until an inward bound train passed, he started after it on a run, hoping to reach the station or open yard before another train came along.

He was successful in reaching the yard, although an engine was roaring at his heels as he dodged from the track.

Manton had not escaped without a bruise, but he was quite thankful at having escaped at all.

An hour later he had aroused a maker of theatrical wigs and was selecting a disguise from his stock. A slight change in his attire, together with the wig and beard, made him seem like a brisk, business-like countryman—not a hayseed, but an individual who had cut all his teeth.

Then he proceeded directly to the hotel where Doris had been staying.

By this time it was early morning, and the great city was beginning to bustle with life.

The detective called for the clerk and was soon questioning that worthy, who was, at first, rather high and lofty, but who took a tumble to himself when the detective shoved a card across the register.

It did not take him long to discover all

the clerk knew, which was of very little value. Miss Venton had left the hotel unaccompanied, being driven away in a cab. She had not returned. The cabman stated he had left her at the corner of Eleventh and Bleeker streets.

She had not been seen afterward.

Manton asked for Walt Fielding and was told the young man had been around at all hours since his beautiful cousin's disappearance, and he seemed nearly distracted. He did not stop in the hotel, but had left his address. This the detective obtained, starting immediately to have an interview with Fielding.

It happened that Walt was not to be found at the apartments he had taken, and Manton was told he had not been there since the previous day. He had paid several days in advance.

Old Deadsure's next move was to hasten to Police Headquarters, where he was unable to obtain anything of satisfaction concerning the affair. However, a sealed envelope was handed him, and, on tearing it open, he discovered a communication left for him by Superintendent Byrnes.

"It read as follows:

"Dead man's nose examined by competent surgeon, as you suggest. Surgeon declares it was broken at some past time, re-fashioned into shape by a most skillful and wonderful process. I trust this information may prove of service to you."

"BYRNES."

Old Deadsure nodded with satisfaction.

"No matter what Jack Cable says," he thought, "I shall believe this man was Tom Burke—until I am convinced I am wrong. The question now remains as to whether Burke and Venton were one and the same. But for the information received from the conductor, I should be inclined to believe so."

He left Police Headquarters and started up-town again. He had not gone far before he discovered he was followed, and he quickly turned to confront the young man at his heels, whom he recognized as the person Fielding had designated as Frank Howland.

"What do you want?" sternly asked the detective.

"I want to speak with you," was the firm reply. "I have followed you from the hotel where Miss Venton was stopping. I know you; you are Old Deadsure, the detective."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLOODLESS BATTLE.

MANTON BURKE was not pleased to know his disguise had been penetrated, but he did not attempt to bluff the young man in the least. Instead of that, he said:

"Very well; if you wish to speak with me, come into this saloon."

He led the way, and Howland followed. Inside the place, they sat down at a table, the detective ordering two beers of the waiter who was promptly at hand.

"Now," said Manton, "what do you want? Speak swiftly and with caution, for my time is limited, and I do not wish to be overheard."

"No more do I, for I am convinced I have many enemies in this city. Walter Fielding is one of them."

"You and Fielding are not on friendly terms?"

"Far from it."

"He does not speak very well of you."

"I did not fancy he would."

"We are wasting time. What do you wish to say to me?"

"I want to tell you I believe I know something about Doris—Miss Venton's disappearance."

"So? What do you know?"

"I believe she has been kidnapped."

"By whom?"

"Fielding."

"What reasons have you for thinking so?"

"She has refused to marry him and spurned his too ardent attentions."

"That all may be; but you must know something more to believe Fielding guilty of spiriting his cousin away."

"There is no reason why I should absolutely know more. He told me to my face he would have her in spite of me—yes, in spite of herself."

"This is interesting, but is very poor ground to work on. Has he ever threatened to kidnap her?"

"Not that I know of."

"What could be his object in doing so?"

"He probably intends to hold her until she agrees to marry him, knowing she might choose me, now she is free from her father's control."

"From this, I infer you were not on friendly terms with Roscoe Venton."

"He did not like me any too well, but he was turned against me by Walt Fielding. That fellow has told any amount of lies about me. Why, he even swore I was a gambler and a crook, and that was why I came to New York so often."

The detective fixed his magnetic eyes on those of the young man.

"He did not speak the truth?" questioned Manton Burke.

Frank flushed.

"Speak the truth!" he exclaimed, with rising indignation. "He is an utter stranger to the truth! He had rather lie than do anything—"

Old Deadsure's fingers closed over the excited young man's wrist.

"Cool and steady," commanded the detective. "You are attracting attention by lifting your voice. That won't do, my boy. Speak lower."

Frank nodded, showing he fully understood.

"Why did you come to New York so often?" asked Manton, keeping those piercing eyes fastened on the young man's.

"For reasons I do not care to state, but I assure you my visits to this city in no way concerned Walt Fielding or Roscoe Venton."

"Did you have a quarrel with Mr. Venton about two weeks before his disappearance?"

"No, sir."

"Fielding says you did."

"Which is another of his lies."

"Did you ask for Doris's hand in marriage?"

"I did."

"With what result?"

"I was refused by her father, although Doris loved me and was willing to become my wife."

"You attribute your ill-success to Fielding's influence over Mr. Venton?"

"In a measure."

"Yet you were willing to be on friendly terms with him when you met him near the Morgue the other day. If you were thus wronged, I do not understand you."

Frank hesitated a few moments, and then he said:

"I was willing to be friendly because I believed it best for all concerned that past enmities were buried, for the time, at least. Mr. Venton had disappeared, and we should unite in the effort to penetrate the mystery of his vanishing."

This explanation did not fully satisfy Manton Burke, but he did not choose to question the young man further on that point. Instead, he asked:

"Did you see Miss Venton while she was stopping at the M— Hotel?"

"I saw her a few moments yesterday afternoon about an hour before she left the hotel, to which she has not since returned."

"How did she receive you?"

Frank blushed.

"I understand," smiled Manton. "You need not answer the question. But did you see anything of Fielding about?"

"Not a sign."

"She did not speak of an engagement?"

"Yes."

"Ah! that is interesting. What did she say about it?"

"Nothing except that she had one for two o'clock."

"She did not tell you the nature of the engagement?"

"No."

"What you know proves to be of small importance."

"Still, I fancied it might amount to something. I have a proposal to make."

"Make it."

"I went you to take me as an assistant in ferreting out the truth concerning this matter. I can be of great service to you, as I know all the parties concerned."

Old Deadsure thought for some minutes, and then he said:

"I believe you might prove of some value, but I have doubts concerning your ability as a detective. However, if you will faithfully obey instructions, I am not sure but I shall have something for you to do."

"You may depend on me, sir."

"All right. Follow me."

Neither of them had drank his beer, and they left the glasses standing when they arose to depart.

At this moment, some rough-looking loafers, who had drifted in one by one after the entrance of the detective and Frank, suddenly began to quarrel.

Hot words were exchanged and blows struck. Then the men grappled and came reeling toward Manton and Frank.

"Look out!" warned the detective, stepping aside.

Frank did not heed the warning, and a sudden blow stretched him on the floor.

Old Deadsure saw the intention of the apparently fighting men was to struggle over the spot where the youth had fallen until he was trampled and maimed—perhaps killed.

With a ringing shout, the detective leaped forward, his fists shooting out right and left

Two men reeled backward and went down before the telling blows.

"You miserable curs!" cried Manton Burke, sending others reeling aside.

With a savage snarl, a dark-faced Italian snatched out a long-bladed knife and made a stroke at Manton's throat.

The detective caught the Dago's wrist, giving it a wrench that caused him to drop the knife, uttering a howl of pain.

But others were at hand, and they sprung like tigers at the throat of the one man who faced them so boldly.

Planting his feet on either side of the fallen Frank Howland, Manton handled his fists in a manner that was enough to command the admiration of a gladiator.

Smack, smack, smack! sounded the blows, and every one counted.

The toughs uttered yells of astonishment and fury, but only sought the harder to get their hands on the wonderful fighter.

The detective knew the sounds of battle must bring policemen in time, and he hoped to hold out until such aid arrived.

In the heat of the fight, the false beard was snatched from his face.

Then one of the toughs uttered a yell of amazement:

"It's Old Deadsure!"

The detective's magnetic eyes seemed to flash sparks of fire, as he thundered:

"Yes, I am Old Deadsure! Come up and take your medicine!"

But the thugs shrank back before those gleaming eyes, one by one, sneaking out at the doors. In a few moments after the unmasking, Manton Burke held the field undisputed.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE CAB.

It was plain the ruffians had not expected to encounter the detective, and that made it evident to Old Deadsure the assault was directed toward Frank Howland.

For what purpose?

Judging by the thugs who were concerned, the intention had been to kill or maim the young man.

But, why should such a thing be done?

Old Deadsure immediately decided there was something behind the open attack. Frank Howland had an enemy, or enemies, who wished him out of the way.

This immediately prejudiced Manton in his favor, for he felt that a man who had such enemies must be pretty decent.

Frank had simply been stunned for the time, and he was struggling to his feet when the last of the toughs left the saloon. Manton helped him up, saying:

"All right, my boy. The enemy has fired and fallen back. Now is our time to vanish."

The detective led the way, and then slipped out of the door of the saloon, just as a policeman entered the front door.

They were not molested, and Frank followed Manton from that section, thinking himself fortunate to get off so easily.

They soon reached Broadway, and Old Deadsure accepted the invitation of a cab-driver to enter his conveyance.

"We want to go up-town quietly, and without being watched," said the detective.

The doors were closed, and they pulled down the window curtains.

"Young man," observed Manton Burke, "you have an enemy who wants to put you out of the way."

"What makes you think so?"

"The attack in the saloon."

"Why?"

"That was directed toward you."

"Do you believe it?"

"I am sure of it. If those fellows had been after me, they would not have been bluffed out so easily when my disguise was accidentally penetrated. Some of them knew me, for they were all crooks and cut-throats, and they were afraid of me. You got it on the head at the very start, and was knocked down. They would have stamped you into the floor if I hadn't been there to stand over you."

"For which you have my sincere thanks. I will not forget—"

"There, there! I don't care for thanks, and I don't mind whether you forget or not. I would have done the same thing for any honest man."

Manton was rather blunt in his speech and manner, but Frank felt the detective was a man who intended to speak his mind on all occasions.

"I know of but one man who could wish to injure me."

"And that man is—who?"

"Walt Fielding."

Manton nodded.

"As I supposed. Of course, there is nothing certain about it, but I have a fancy Fielding was at the back of this."

"Somehow, I think so now."

"In that case, he either fears you, or he hates you so intensely he is willing to resort to desperate means to put you out of his way."

"I am certain he both hates and fears me."

Manton was silent for a few seconds, and then he declared:

"This affair has made me think there may possibly be something in your belief that Fielding kidnapped Miss Venton. If he did so, it was to get her beyond your reach until you were disposed of fully. Then he could bring her forward and pose as her guardian, or something of that sort. Perhaps Roscoe Venton's will makes Fielding the girl's guardian until she marries. Such a thing is not at all improbable."

"Not at all."

"I wish I had possessed time to investigate about his will while in Buffalo; but I felt an attraction drawing me back to New York. Now that Miss Venton has vanished, I fancy I did not get back too soon. It begins to look as if there is some big piece of rascality on foot; but I am willing to confess I do not quite understand the nature of it at present."

Manton was not in the habit of making such confessions, but he almost seemed musing aloud just then. He had struck a puzzling case, for, if there was a crime, he could not yet comprehend the object of the criminal. The best explanation just then seemed to be that Fielding was at the bottom of the whole matter, and that made it seem as if he were plotting to obtain possession of the missing druggist's beautiful daughter.

Old Deadsure had not been able to learn the entire truth concerning Roscoe Venton's wealth, but he believed the man had been in much better financial circumstances than was generally supposed. Perhaps Fielding possessed the secret of the druggist's wealth, the acquirement of which was the real motif of the crime.

Certainly Fielding himself had had no further connection with Venton's vanishing than planning it, for he had not left Buffalo for an hour during the past month.

However, Manton did not look on this as at all favorable so far as the young man was concerned, for he had probably been shrewd enough to cover his tracks as far as possible. There were plenty of thugs who could be hired for money to do any kind of a "job." Possibly Fielding had resorted to such a means of removing all barriers between himself and beautiful Doris Venton. In fact, it seemed quite possible, if he had engaged the ruffians to down the only rival he feared.

This was all speculation with the detective, and he never accepted anything as being actually so unless he had some proof of its truth.

For a while the two men within the cab were silent. They were rattling and bouncing over the stones at a rapid rate of speed, while horse-cars, carriages and cabs rattled and rumbled past on either side.

Suddenly, Manton began to snuff the air suspiciously.

"Do you notice a peculiar odor?" he asked.

Frank started and passed a hand over his forehead, seeming somewhat dazed.

"Odor?" he echoed, questioningly. "Seems to—me—I do. What—"

"It is like chloroform!" cried Old Dead-sure. "This cab is full of it! I can't breathe."

He tried to open the window, but found it securely fastened. He tried the door, with a like result. Then he shouted to the driver, ordering it to stop.

The odor was becoming overpowering and terrible, and the men in the cab must have fresh air in a few moments, or become senseless.

Onward dashed the cab, for the driver either did not hear or did not heed their cries.

Then, with his bare hand, Manton dashed out the glass of the window, and an inward rush of fresh air followed. The two men inhaled it greedily, for their brains had begun to grow befogged.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Frank.

"It means that we have had a narrow escape. Chloroform was gradually injected into this carriage until we were on the point of being overcome. It is a trick of the devil's!"

Thrusting his head out at the broken window, he called to the driver until that individual heard him and slackened his pace. Then Manton opened the door from the outside and leaped to the ground, Frank following closely.

Barely had the two men left the cab when the driver lashed his horses with the whip and dashed away.

Old Dead-sure looked around for a conveyance in which to pursue the rascal, but it did not happen to be at hand, and the cab-man obtained such a start that pursuit was useless.

"If I had placed my hands on him, I would have squeezed him until he peached!" grimly grated the detective. "I am certain he could have told something that would have been valuable to me."

"But, I don't understand it at all," protested Frank. "What was the trick?"

"It was a scheme of your foes or mine to get us out of the way, but its boldness was simply astounding. That very cabman was on the watch for us. After we entered the cab and closed the doors, which are made secure from the outside, he squirted a bit of chloroform into the closed place where we were. Somewhere under his control there was a syringe filled with the stuff, and he came pretty near doctoring us successfully. Had we been overcome, he would have carried us to some place where we would have been delivered into the hands of his employers. This cab racket is worked on men who have been drinking usually, and the boldness of attempting it on us in daylight is more than I can understand. It was both bold and foolhardy."

Frank followed Manton to a hotel at Union Square where the detective took a room.

"As I have no office in the city, my headquarters will be wherever I am," laughed Manton.

For half an hour they discussed things in which both were intensely interested, and the detective decided to depend on Frank to a certain extent for assistance in working out the strange case. Having agreed on future meetings and so forth, Manton sent the young man out to pick up whatever information he could.

For the first time that day, the detective ate something, after which he wrote some letters. Then he went out to continue work.

It was evening when the detective returned, and he found a letter awaiting him. Tearing it open, he read as follows:

"MR. MANTON BURKE,

"DEAR SIR:—I know something about Doris Venton that may prove of value to you, for I believe she is imprisoned in a room within this house. Come here at 10 o'clock to-night and call for Rufe Schayer, and I will be waiting for you. If you mean business, be prepared to pay me fifty dollars when I show you the girl, for I am a poor man, and I am not doing this for nothing. I am one of 'the gang' who is willing to blow if we're paid."

"RUFE SCHAYER."

Following this was the street and number. Manton instantly saw "Mr. Schayer" lived in a decidedly tough locality, to say the very least.

The moment he had finished reading the note, Old Dead-sure exclaimed:

"This is a trick to entrap me, but a decidedly shallow one, that is certain. This man may be poor, but he is not illiterate, as his writing discloses. I wonder if my enemies really expect me to walk into such a bare-faced snare?"

He smiled grimly, and then became sober.

"Well, they shall not be disappointed," he said. "I will be on hand to meet Mr. Schayer."

During the afternoon, he had ordered his trunk sent to the hotel, and he found it there.

Having decided to answer the note, he unlocked the trunk and took out two small but deadly-looking revolvers.

"I am pretty apt to want these before morning," he observed, as he loaded the weapons. "They don't take up much room in my pockets, but they are handy things to have about a fellow when he is cornered."

At about 9.30 he left the hotel, and he had reached his destination a few minutes before 10.

The place was a ramshackle old building, and the neighborhood was vile. He knew he was in a very hot-bed of poverty and crime, but he did not hesitate about calling for Rufe Schayer.

A sinister-looking negress told him to go up one flight and try the first door on the left. He ascended the stairs and rapped on the door.

"Come in," commanded a rough voice.

CHAPTER X.

AGAINST ODDS.

OLD DEAD-SURE did not hesitate about entering. Thrusting open the door he strode boldly into the room, prepared for any emergency that might arise.

A rough-looking man was seated in a common wooden chair, another chair was all the furniture the room contained.

Are you Rufe Schayer?" asked the detective.

"Wal, dat's me name," was the reply. "I reckon you's dat moke wot dey call's Old Dead-sure, eh?"

"I am Old Dead-sure," unhesitatingly acknowledged Manton.

"Den youse got me letter?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know but you'd t'ink I was stringin' yer, an' so yer wouldn't come."

"Did you write the letter?"

"Course I did!"

Manton's black eyes seemed to pierce the tough through and through, and Schayer moved uneasily before that steady gaze.

"Wot yer lookin' at me dat way fer?" he asked.

"I always take a good deal of interest in a liar," was the cool retort.

The tough snarled and showed some yellow teeth, while he wheeled to face the placid detective.

"D'yer mean ter call me a liar?" he fumed.

"If you say you wrote that letter, I do. Why, you couldn't spell cat correctly. The letter was written by a man of some education."

For some moments Schayer seemed in doubt whether to get angry or not, but it was apparent he decided not to do so, for he grinned a bit and nodded toward the other chair.

"Set down," he invited. "You're too sharp for me. I can't write, an' it hain't no use fer me ter make a bluff. I got a feller ter do dat for me."

"That sounds better," admitted Manton, declining to accept the chair. "You claim to know something about Doris Venton."

"Dat's wot. Set down, boss."

"You can tell me where she is?"

"Sure. Do set down, boss."

Still ignoring the invitation, Manton sprung another question:

"Who is in this little game with you?"

Schayer started the least bit.

"Nobody," he declared.

Again those magnetic eyes seemed to bore holes in the reckless tough.

"If you mean to do business with me," suavely said the detective, "you will have to let up on lying and give me a square deal. You can't wool Old Dead-sure a little bit, my lad. I know you are a hard nut, and all that, but you weren't incubated when I began running in your kind."

Schayer scowled blackly.

"I s'pose dat's some kind of a treat," he muttered, hoarsely. "But I don't skeer fer a dern, an' don't yer fergit it. I hain't afeared of you, ef you be Old Dead-sure, and don't yer fergit dat."

A grim smile played on Dead-sure's face for a moment.

"You are very bold, Schayer. How near are your pals?"

"Hain't got no pals. Dis is on the square. Set down an' we'll talk it over."

"I prefer to stand."

The anxiety of the man to get Old Dead-sure seated aroused the suspicion of the astute detective, for he fancied there was some kind of a snare connected with the chair. In fact, he was quite certain this was true, for Schayer could not entirely conceal his disappointment.

"Have yer brought der fifty plunks?" asked the tough.

"Won't my check do?"

"Well, not any! I hain't gittin' no checks cashed dese days! It takes der solid rocks ter do biz wid me."

Manton stepped forward and looked straight into the eyes of the tough, catching Schayer's gaze squarely. The fellow tried to turn away, but a strange, unknown force seemed to hold him spellbound and helpless, while a look of terror spread over his face.

For some moments the two men remained motionless, and a look of dullness gradually stole over the face of the tough. He sat motionless and staring, while Manton made a few mysterious passes with his hands.

"Now, my dear sir," said the detective, quietly, "you are mine to command. You will be obliged to answer my questions truthfully. In the first place, what is your correct name?"

"Sam Duffy."

The reply was made in a mechanical manner.

"Just so," nodded Manton. "Now Mr. Duffy, where are your pals?"

"He needn't answer that," said a voice behind the detective. "We are here!"

Old Dead-sure wheeled to find himself confronted by four big men who had entered the room with amazing silence.

"You are trapped, Manton Burke!" exultantly cried the leader.

"Do you really think so?"

"We know it. You cannot escape. I did not hardly think you would walk into the snare so readily. Your boasted shrewdness amounts to nothing."

"I never boast of my shrewdness, Cool Hand Charley."

"Ha! you know me!"

"I do. And I know now you were with Ben McGath in the attack upon me on the train this morning."

Cool Hand Charley forced a laugh.

"You are right," he confessed. "I grasped you from behind. How you escaped death beneath the car wheels is more than I can understand, but I know you will not escape this time."

Dead-sure did not seem in the least excited or alarmed.

"You don't know anything of the kind, Roberts. I am not very easily downed. Who is backing you in this business?"

"No one."

"Now, you lie!"

"Do you dare—"

"Cool and easy, Charley. Remember you are called a cool hand. I know you are not in this of your own hook, for you have no object."

"Revenge."

"Bah! Would you take such desperate chances just because I sent you up for a little while once on a time?"

"You bet!"

"If I do, I shall wager my wealth against anything of the kind. You are not a common crook—"

"No, thanks! That doesn't go with me."

"It is right. There is no reason why you should mingle with a lot of ordinary toughs in the attempt to wipe me out, unless somebody is behind it all with a roll of the needful."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference about that. We are here to do you up, and you can bet your hide we'll finish the job to the queen's taste! Come, Sam."

"Never mind Sam," said Manton. "He won't help you any this time, for he doesn't feel the need of exercise. In fact, he is real tired."

The bogus "Rufe Schayer" sat in his chair as if glued there, never making a motion to arise and assist his pals. He was completely controlled by the wonderful magnetic influence of the great detective.

Suddenly Cool Hand Charley made a signal.

An instant later the light of the room went out, and the place was in utter darkness.

Manton instantly retreated to the wall.

"Come on!" he cried. "I am ready!"

Then he grabbed the empty chair and made a sweep through the air with it.

Crack! it struck against the skull of one of the thugs, and the fellow was knocked down.

Then Manton leaped forward, striking savagely with his weapon.

He felt that his enemies had done a very foolish thing in extinguishing the light, for they had given him the advantage of darkness where every man was his foe and none of his blows could reach a friend.

On the other hand, they might wound or injure each other in the struggle.

The real truth was that the men feared his magnetic eyes. In the darkness they felt safe from the weird influence of those wonderful orbs.

Suddenly he felt the chair torn from his grasp. He dropped on his hands and knees, and a man plunged headlong over him. His fingers closed on the person of his fallen enemy, and he arose to his feet, lifting the fellow above his head and casting him through the air.

The human catapult struck against one of his comrades, and the two went to the floor with a crash that jarred the building.

Just at this moment, Manton saw a gleam of light that he knew came from beneath a door leading into another room.

With sudden resolution, he leaped at the door and burst it open, plunging into the lighted room, where he found himself face to face with Baltimore Ben.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRAZY PROFESSOR.

McGATH held a revolver leveled straight at Old Deadsure's head, and his eyes showed he intended to put a bullet in Manton's brain.

The detective realized his peril and ducked just as the revolver spoke, allowing the bullet to whistle over his head.

Behind him there was a cry of pain and a heavy fall.

The bullet had found a human target, but Deadsure was quite untouched.

Then he fairly hurled himself at Baltimore Ben's throat, upon which one of his sinewy hands fastened.

With his other hand he grasped the pistol and wrenched it from the fingers of the murderous crook.

With a surge and a trip, Manton flung McGath at full length on the floor.

Then he whirled to face the door through which he expected his foes to follow him.

Stretched across the threshold of the room was a man. He had fallen before the bullet intended for Manton.

Cool Hand Charley and two remaining companions were on the point of following the fighting ferret into the room.

"Come on, if you want to!" rung out the detective's voice, as he lifted the captured revolver. "Come right in and keep the fun going! I am bound to give you all the sport you want—and a little more!"

They knew him, and they instantly dodged to either side, expecting a perfect hailstorm of bullets.

Manton's brain was in action, and he real-

ized he was in a bad position, for the room he occupied was lighted, while the only light in the other was what shone through the broken door. This gave his foes a chance to pick him off with a single shot.

One stride took him to a position where he could blow out the light, and just as he did so, Baltimore Ben caught him about the legs and tripped him.

In falling, it happened that the detective plunged one of his knees full into McGath's stomach, quite knocking the wind out of the crook for a minute.

Manton was instantly released, and he made the best of his liberty by getting away.

Into the room tumbled Cool Hand Charley and his two comrades, all calling to McGath.

Just as he blew out the light, the detective had noticed another door, and he resolved to try it, if he could find it in the darkness.

He was very successful in this respect, for he almost immediately put his hand on the knob. Quickly opening the door, he stepped through and closed it behind him. As he did this, his fingers touched what instinct told him was a heavy bolt, and he fastened the door.

Then he paused to listen a moment, hearing his foes speaking to each other. They had seen him slip from the room, and, as soon as they were sure it was not one of their number who had gone out thus, they began to congratulate each other, for they said there was no way for him to escape from the place where he now was, save by the way he entered.

"We have you foul, Manton Burke!" triumphantly called Cool Hand Charley.

"I'll sock a lead pill into the first man who tries to get in here!" retorted the detective.

He saw there was one window in the room, and he stole lightly to it. The panes of glass were broken and the window generally was in a wrecked condition.

"I wonder how far it is to the ground?" thought Manton. "Can I make it on a jump?"

He made some noise in opening the window, but his enemies remained silent in the adjoining room.

Looking out, Manton soon discovered he could not leap to the ground, and then he sought to discover some other method of escape.

There was no fire-escape on the building, not even a water-spout on which he could venture to attempt a descent, and he could see no way of swinging from one window to another.

It did, indeed, look as if he had made his way into a most secure trap.

"If that is true, they will have lots of sport with me before they do me up," thought Manton.

Just then something struck against his hand, and he was amazed to see a knotted rope that dangled within his reach. He thrust his head out of the window and looked upward, discerning the head of a man between himself and the sky.

The man was leaning from a window above.

"Sh!" bissed the man. "Come up."

"Well, I don't know about that," thought the detective. "I might get out of the frying-pan into the fire."

He could not help thinking this might be another trick of his enemies, so he hesitated.

"It's your only chance," whispered the man in the window overhead. "They'll murder you if you stay there. I will save you. Trust me."

Manton suddenly resolved to do so, and he climbed softly up on the window-sill. He knew the knotted rope might be cut the moment he ventured upon it, but something told him to run the risk.

"I'm coming," he whispered.

Being a thorough athlete, he did not find it so very difficult to climb the knotted rope, and he soon was at the upper window, where a hand that was thin and bony gave him assistance in entering.

"Ha! ha!" softly chuckled the stranger, as he pulled up the rope. "You have fooled them this time. They won't know where you have gone, and they'll never dream Old Crazy had a hand in getting you out of the trap."

"Well, I don't know as I understand this," admitted Manton, speaking with caution.

"Will you tell me how it happens you were on hand to aid me?"

"Certainly! certainly! I heard the racket below, and through a knot-hole in the floor, I saw you fighting against odds. I liked your face, and I do not like the kind of people I have all around me. When you got into the room under this, I thought I would aid you if possible."

"And you did so. I have much to thank you for."

"Don't mention it, sir."

A candle was burning dimly in the room, and Manton saw a lank skeleton-like man whose face was sallow and haggard and whose hair and thin beard were long and white. He immediately felt that this man was quite out of his natural element in such a place, and he scarcely believed it possible he was in any way connected with the thugs below.

"Whom have I the honor of thanking?" asked Old Deadsure.

The stranger hesitated a moment, and then he answered.

"I am usually called Professor Crank, sometimes the still more irreverent make it Old Crazy. Neither one of these names is my rightful one, of course, but either of them will do. My name must be kept a secret for the present, but if I ever recover my stolen invention, I shall make it known to the world."

Manton noticed his voice quivered a little, as if he had spoken of something that affected him greatly.

At this moment heavy blows were heard below.

"They are breaking down the door," said Professor Crank. "They will find the rat is not in the trap. Oh, the wretched villains! It does me good to baffle them! What a terrible thing it is that so much wickedness and crime exist in the world!"

The detective rested a hand on the old man's arm, thus requesting silence, and at that instant a resounding crash told the door had fallen.

Following the breaking down of the door there was a brief silence, and then cries of astonishment and fury were heard.

The thugs had discovered Deadsure's escape.

Professor Crank rubbed his bony hands together with intense satisfaction.

"The window is open!" they heard Baltimore Ben cry. "He must have jumped to the ground!"

Then there was a babel of voices for a few moments, at the conclusion of which the men were heard skurrying from the room below.

"They are going to look for you under the window," said Professor Crazy. "It is best to extinguish the candle in this room, and then they will not suspect anything."

So the candle was snuffed out.

From the window they saw the dark figures which left the house and moved about below, and Manton laughed softly, satisfied by the astonishment and wonder he had created.

He knew the thugs would begin to think it an impossibility to kill him, for had he not escaped death beneath the car-wheels and then given them the slip by jumping far enough to maim or kill an ordinary man?

"Old man," said the detective, "I will not forget you."

Professor Crank sighed.

"You are not the first one who has promised not to forget," he said, sadly; "but I am all alone in the world now. If I were to die to-night, no one in all the land could identify me and call me by name. Yet there was a time when I was respected and honored, and many a great newspaper predicted a brilliant career for me. Another man robbed me of all my glory."

"Who?"

"Thomas Edison!"

"Not Edison the electrician?"

"The very same, sir."

"How could he rob you?"

"By getting ahead of me in bringing out every invention I studied upon. I am an electrician, sir, and all the things which Edison has made known to the world I discovered quite as soon as he. But I have no money or influence, and thus I have been hampered. Just as I would be on the point of bringing out some wonderful thing, Tom

Edison would make that very thing known to the world. Thus, time and again, have I been crushed and baffled."

Old Deadsure was interested, although he was inclined to believe the man deranged.

"Now," the strange man continued, choked by a sob, "I am an old and lonely man, and Thomas Edison has ruined me!"

Manton heard him weeping softly in the darkness.

CHAPTER XII.

MANTON STEPS IN.

THE detective was strangely affected by the suppressed weeping of the singular old man. There was something intensely pathetic about it.

After a short silence, Professor Crank seemed to recover his composure enough to say:

"I trust you will excuse my weakness, friend. I am a very old man, and I suppose I must be getting a little childish. It is only since the loss of my last great invention that I have given way to tears. Before that I had steeled myself to boldly face whatever came, and the greatest calamity did not unnerve me. But a man gets broken down after a while. I am not what I used to be—far from it! far from it!"

Manton scarcely knew what to say. He was in the habit of dealing with crime and wickedness, and the grief of his present companion touched a new chord in his bosom. He pitied the old fellow, even though he fancied his losses and misfortunes were of a chimerical nature.

Before the detective brought himself to speak, Old Crazy went on:

"When I lost Agnes I resolved to devote myself to science—I decided to become so famous the whole world would ring with my name. There was nothing else to live for, as you must understand how deeply I loved her. My heaven lay in her violet eyes. Oh, she was beautiful! She was lithe and supple as the sea, and her hair seemed filled with the gold of a summer sunset. Her lips were like rose petals, and her breath held the faint sweet perfume of a meadow in Junetime. We grew up as children together, and I always loved her with a passion that made her seem an angel in my eyes. She loved me, too! Oh, life was very sweet in those far-away days!"

The old man's voice had sunk to a rapturous murmur, and the listener was bound with a spell, for he recognized the poet in the soul of his strange companion.

The mad professor seemed to forget for a time that he was not alone, and he went on, speaking earnestly:

"Oh, Agnes! why did you sell yourself for his gold! He made your life miserable and scorned you at last, while I would have slaved for you that I might have made you happy. He was a dog! I am glad he died as he did, and his death was that of a dog! And you, poor, sweet child, you dragged yourself back to the old home and found a grave in the little valley where we used to chase butterflies and listen to the murmur of the brook."

Manton felt as if he knew the singular man's entire life history. The loss of the fair one he had worshiped made him the miserable wretch he was.

The detective stirred slightly, and the faint noise he made seemed to recall Professor Crank to a realization of his surroundings. The old fellow had sunk into a hard chair, and Manton could dimly see him sitting with his hands pressed over his face. At the moment, he lowered his hands, saying:

"Won't you sit down? You do not want to attempt to leave here until your foes give up searching for you. There is a poor chair close by you. It is the best I can offer."

"It is good enough," declared the detective, as he seated himself.

"I have been troubling you with my sorrows," Old Crazy said, in an apologetic manner. "You mustn't mind. Sometimes I sit all alone in this room for hours and talk to myself. I am the only person I can find to talk to, for almost everybody is afraid of me. I don't know why they should be. I wouldn't harm any one for the world."

"Oh, I do get so lonesome at times! There is no solitude as overbearing and appalling as that experienced by a person in a great

city where he has no friends and no one to speak with. It is terrible! I shall be much better after I have talked to you, so I hope you won't mind anything strange I may say. It is such a relief to find some one who will listen to me. Sometimes I have longed to make the world listen while I talked."

For some time the old fellow rambled on, and Manton did not interrupt him. Finally, he began speaking of his inventions once more.

"I depended entirely on my last," he said, sadly; "and that was stolen from me just when I had almost completed it. Little good will it do the ones who carried it away!"

"That was to be the most wonderful of all inventions. I have worked on the principle and theory that electricity is life—if rightly applied. I believe by means of electricity a human life may be indefinitely prolonged, but human beings do not know how to use the life-giving current. For years, it has been my aim to perfect an instrument that would impart life to perishing bodies. In a few days more I would have had my instrument finished, and then it was stolen.

"Sir, that last blow would have broken my poor old heart, but in the night I had a vision, and in the vision I was told the instrument would return to me in time. That is the only thing I have to live for now."

"But the thieves who took it away will find it a dangerous toy. If they do not handle it correctly, somebody will be killed with the thing. It is capable of cutting short the thread of human existence in an instant."

When the old man had tired talking about this wonderful invention, Manton asked him about the people who occupied the building they were in.

"I should think they would have been aroused by what has taken place," he said. "Still, no one has shown any signs of investigating."

"Because it is dangerous to do so," asserted Old Crazy. "The house is full of criminals, and they take care not to meddle with each other's business. It is quite probable the principal people knew there was to be trouble in the rooms below to night, and they had been warned not to interfere, no matter what they heard. If so, they knew better than to come around, even though doors were broken down and pistols fired."

"Well, I never heard of such a place as this before," the detective confessed—"not even in New York City, where one can find 'most anything."

Suddenly the door of the room opened without the least warning, and three men stepped into the room. One of them bore a light, while the other two held ready revolvers.

The men with the revolvers were Cool Hand Charley and Baltimore Ben!

Manton had leaped to his feet the instant the door began to open, catching up his chair as he did so. The moment he realized his enemies were upon him again, he sent the chair hurtling through the air.

The missile struck the man with the lamp, knocking him over.

At that instant both McGrath and Roberts fired, but Manton had dodged, and the bullets did not touch him.

With a yell that was like the scream of a panther, he leaped straight toward the three men!

Biff! biff! two blows were struck. Ben and Charley reeled aside, clutching at a dark figure that went flitting past and vanished through the doorway by which they had entered.

"After him!" shouted the Cool Hand. Manton heard them in pursuit.

"I am having a regular jubilee this night!" he thought.

Then Baltimore Ben was heard shouting:

"Look out, pals! He's coming! Down him!"

"So there are watchers below!" grated the detective. "Well, they are bound to be sadly and sweetly left."

He saw some steps leading to a skylight, and he lost not a moment in mounting to the roof.

Fortune favored him, for he reached the roof without his foes discovering which way he had gone. But he well knew it would be but a short time before they would come after him, and so he must find a means of descent.

Running lightly across the roof, he found another skylight, which he was able to open. There were no stairs beneath, but he did not hesitate about dropping.

He landed lightly on his feet, standing still a moment, while he listened and considered.

All at once, his attention was attracted by the sound of voices within an adjoining room. Two persons were speaking, one a man and the other a girl.

"It's no use fer ye ter beg," growled the man. "You can't work that over me."

"But I will pay you well," pleaded the girl.

"I'm paid well ernough now."

"I will double what you are getting."

"It hain't no go. Females can't be trusted. I trusted one once, an' she landed me in Sing Sing fer my foolishness."

"You need not fear me, for I'll do exactly as I promise. I do not ask you to tell who hired you to bring me here, but—"

"Thar hain't no secret 'bout that. Howlan' means ter make ye marry him 'fore he lets ye go."

"You can't fool me. Frank Howland had nothing to do with this infamous piece of business."

The listening detective could not repress a slight exclamation of satisfaction, for he had found the missing girl, Doris Venton!

"Ho!" grunted the man. "So you know more 'bout this then I do! All right; think what you like. If you know more 'bout this then I do, I hain't got nothin' ter say."

"Frank Howland has no reason for doing such a thing."

"Hain't, eh? That's all you know about it, purty one. I know he has mighty good reasons fer not wantin' ye loose in New York."

"Tell me one reason."

"I don't have to."

"You can't."

"Could if I wanted to. Anyhow, he's got mighty good taste. You're a beaut, an' no mistake! Say, if you thought a good heap of me, mebbe I'd let ye go."

There was a moment of silence, and then a voice full of suppressed indignation and alarm asked:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you oughter understand, darling. I'm clean stuck on your style, an' a female kin have her way with me if she loves me hard. Come, dear, give me a kiss."

"Back, you wretch!"

"Ha! ha! ha! That don't work with me. Holy smoke! but you do look immense! I must just hug you once—I can't help it!"

"Help!"

A wild shriek of terror came from the room.

With one blow of his fist, Old Deadsure burst open the door and strode into the room.

A brutal-looking man was on the point of grasping a beautiful girl in his arms, and the girl was indeed the missing Doris!

"Hands off that girl, you beastly wretch!" thundered the Madison Square Detective, his midnight eyes gleaming with a dangerous light.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOST AGAIN—DETECTIVE vs. DETECTIVE.
THE astounded ruffian fell back a step.

"The devil!" he gasped.

Doris Venton started toward Manton Burke, a glad cry breaking from her lips.

"Save me!" she entreated.

"I will," was the calm reply.

"I dunno 'bout that!" snarled the tough, suddenly catching the girl by the arm and swinging her behind him. "I've got a little something to say in this case."

"Mighty little it will be," asserted Manton, advancing with a quick step and holding the ruffian's gaze chained. "What do you think you can do?"

"I—I'll—show—ye," retorted the other, with a great effort, the power of speech seeming to slip beyond his grasp. "What's—matter—with—me? I—can't—"

He tried to turn his head away or lift his hands to shut out the glare of the detective's eyes; but he was unable to do so, and he even failed to utter any more words. He stood like a creature turned to stone.

Advancing within reach of the rascal, Manton touched him on the forehead, at the

same time looking deep into the glassy eyes that were turned upon his own.

"You will have to do just as I say now," firmly asserted the magnetic detective. "You cannot lift a finger to molest me or prevent this girl from leaving this place. Thirty minutes after we are gone, you will awaken and be yourself again."

The amazed girl was watching this singular occurrence, scarcely able to credit her senses. The light that flashed from the ferret's dark eyes appalled her, and when she saw how easily Manton overcame the ruffian, she was ready to faint with fear.

But when Old Deadsure turned toward her, there was nothing but gentleness and consideration to be seen in those wonderful eyes, and the hard lines of his face had softened until he looked like a fatherly old gentleman. Just then no one would have believed him the great detective and fearless fighter of crime.

"I trust you are not harmed, Miss Venton?" he said. "If you have been in any way, your enemies shall suffer."

She was reassured in a measure, and still she shrank away at his approach. He understood her timidity, and hastened to quiet her fears.

"I am your best friend," he declared. "Your enemies hate and fear me, and you may trust me fully."

"Thank you," she replied, simply. "I am not harmed; but I fear I should have been had not you appeared just as you did. I owe you more than I can express."

"I am indebted for the pleasure of protecting you. If we were not in such a quarter and my enemies were not right at my heels, I would take this rascal along and see that he received proper punishment. As it is, I must be content in getting you away. We have no time to lose."

Doris caught up her hat and wrap from a chair, and he assisted her as far as possible. In a few moments, they were picking their way down the dark stairs.

Without difficulty, they found their way to the street, but barely had they passed out of the building when several dark figures sprung out of the shadows and leaped upon them.

The detective knew he had another battle against odds and on his hands, he instantly placed himself in front of the girl.

"Down him!" snarled a voice. "It's Old Deadsure!"

He fancied his eyes caught a glimpse of glinting steel, and he fully realized his danger, now he was incumbered with the girl.

Quickly dodging the first man, he caught the fellow up from the ground and hurled him upon the head and shoulders of another of his foes, both going down in a heap.

Then the very thing he feared most took place.

The girl fled shrieking into the darkness of an alley. He could not follow her, but he saw two dark figures vanish in the alley, and he knew some of the thugs were in pursuit.

Backing against a wall, Manton whipped out the revolvers he had not used until this moment. He fired two shots, neither of which was intended to take a life, for he had a way of avoiding such desperate measures when possible.

The shots served his purpose, for one of the ruffians cried:

"He's pulled his gun! Skip!"

The dark figures seemed to melt away in the shadows, and Old Deadsure found himself alone.

Sounding the police call, he dashed into the alley, hoping to overtake Doris Venton and her pursuers.

The alley was short, and he discovered no traces of the ones for whom he was looking.

In a few moments, he was joined by two policemen, to whom he briefly told what had occurred.

A search for Doris followed, but it was quite fruitless, although Manton and the policemen spent nearly three hours in that manner. The Madison Square Detective was forced to give up at last, but he instructed the policemen to watch that quarter closely, and a call for special men was sent in.

Feeling thoroughly angry and disgusted, Manton made his way from that locality. It was long after the midnight hour, and he

decided to return to his hotel and see if Frank Howland had reported.

Imagine his surprise when, on turning a corner suddenly, he came face to face with Frank, who was hurrying along, his hat pulled well down over his eyes. The young man gave a great start when he saw the detective, and Manton fancied a look of dismay spread over his face.

"Hello, Howland," called the ferret.

"Hello," muttered Frank, speaking with an effort.

"How does it happen you are here at this hour?" asked Manton.

"I—I had business here," was the stammered reply.

"What kind of business?"

Frank's manner was increasing Manton's suspicion.

"Oh, I was trying to find some trace of Doris."

The detective knew he did not speak the truth, but he did not question him any more just then. Instead, he said:

"And I came here for the same purpose. Let's go to the hotel."

Frank agreed, and they were soon on a horse car.

When the hotel was reached, Manton led the way to his room, instructing Frank to follow. The young man had quite recovered his composure.

"Look here, Howland," said Old Deadsure, when they were alone in the room, "I have heard something unpleasant about you to-night."

Frank was surprised.

"What did you hear?" he asked.

"That you had a hand in the kidnapping of Miss Venton."

The young man was astounded.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "Who could tell such a thing about me? It is a dastardly lie! Why should I do such a thing when I—I love her! You do not believe this, Mr. Burke—it cannot be you believe it?"

The detective was watching him closely.

"No," he said, "I don't think I believe it."

"But I do!"

The door opened without ceremony, and a man stepped into the room.

It was Jack Cable, the police detective.

"I trust you will excuse my abrupt entrance," he grinned; "but business is business."

"What is your business?" demanded Old Deadsure, sternly facing Cable.

"I am here to take that young fellow into custody."

The police ferret pointed a finger straight at Frank Howland, who was too astounded to utter a word.

"What for?" asked Manton.

"For the best of reasons. Stand aside. I will not be bothered by you!"

"Won't eh? You are in my room, Cable."

"Bah! What do I care for that?"

"This young man is in my charge, and you cannot touch him."

"Now, you are talking through your hat!" sneered Cable. "I have the power. You are not a regular officer, and so you are not in it. Stand aside!"

He attempted to advance on Frank, but Old Deadsure still blocked the way.

"Do you take me for a fool, Cable? You can't walk over Manton Burke, and you ought to know that. We have bucked against each other in the past, and I do not remember the occasion when you got the best of me."

"This is no time for bragging."

"I am not bragging. I tell you now you cannot put a hand on Frank Howland while he is in my room."

"We shall see. I do not fear you. You used to be quite a scrapper, but five years makes a big difference in a man at your time of life. You must be out of it now, and I am right in my prime."

"So you mean fight?"

"If I cannot get Howland any other way."

"You can't get him that way."

"We'll see!"

The police ferret leaped forward, striking at Old Deadsure's face. Manton avoided the blow with ease, and it did him good to deliver one in return that caught Cable under the ear and fairly lifted him off his feet,

hurling him headlong into a corner, where he lay for some moments in a dazed condition.

When the police ferret arose, he saw Manton sitting in an easy-chair, calmly smoking a cigar.

Frank Howland had vanished from the room.

"I'll get square for this!" snarled the baffled regular, shaking his fist at the man with the cigar, after which he bolted from the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

CABLE IS PERSISTENT.

JACK CABLE departed raving furiously, taunted by the calm smile on the face of the Madison Square Detective.

Manton had told Frank Howland to get out of the room as soon as Cable was knocked down by that fearful blow, and the young man had obeyed without asking questions.

Then Deadsure lighted a cigar and sat down to await the police detective's recovery, which shortly took place.

"Good-night," called Manton, as the baffled detective passed out at the door.

"Go to blazes!" Cable flung back, slamming the door fiercely.

Manton was not at all satisfied by the result of the affair, for young Howland was still under a cloud.

"The fellow acted a little queer when I met him to-night," muttered the Madison Square Detective; "but I am not ready to believe him crooked. Still, he must explain why he visited New York so frequently. Some of the things told of him will bear investigation."

He was in desperate need of sleep, and so, making sure his door and windows were secure, he flung himself on the bed without undressing, falling asleep almost instantly.

Manton was able to get nearly three hours of rest, and he awoke greatly refreshed.

Even at that early hour he found a message awaiting him in his office, and the clerk said it had been brought in thirty minutes before. He tore open the envelope and took out a sheet of paper, on which was written in a beautiful feminine hand:

"MR. MANTON BURKE,

"DEAR SIR:—I escaped all right, and am safe beyond the reach of my enemies; but I am worried about Mr. Howland, and I wish you would call as early as you can. I have some things of importance to tell you. Don't fail to come."

"Truly yours, DORIS VENTON."

The detective scanned the note closely, suspecting another trap.

An address was given after the signature, and he saw it was in a very respectable portion of the city. Still, his foes were crafty, and he felt that their resources were almost unlimited. However, he seemed to be a person who courted peril, and he immediately decided to answer the note by calling, as requested.

As he had been invited to call as early as he could, he started at once.

Manton was soon ringing the bell at the number given, and he asked for Doris Venton when the door was opened. He was admitted and requested to wait in the parlor while his name was taken to the lady.

It was quite fifteen minutes before Doris appeared, but Doris it was, without a doubt.

"My dear Miss Venton," cried Manton, rising, "I must congratulate you! I feared you were still in the hands of your foes."

"I escaped them, thanks to you," she said, offering him her hand with a childish frankness that quite won his tenderest respect. "But for your opportune appearance—oh, I shudder to think of that!"

She suddenly covered her face with her hands. She looked tired and worn.

"I have only slept a short time," she explained. "My nerves were so shaken I could not sleep, but the kind lady here gave me something to quiet them, and I was asleep when you came."

"And I awoke you? Too bad! I would have remained away longer if—"

"Ah, but I wanted you to come at once. It is a wonder I could sleep at all! My poor father! What can have become of him?"

"That is a mystery I hope to solve, but I have not struck upon a clue yet. In fact, I have had little time to work on that matter since getting back from Buffalo, for I found you had mysteriously vanished when I arrived here, and I immediately turned my at-

tention to discovering what had become of you."

"And you found me—"

"By chance."

"Still, you found me."

"How did you happen to be in such a scrape?"

"You see, I received a letter which stated the writer knew where my father was. Now that I do not believe any of the contents of the letter, I do not mind telling what it said. It claimed my father was on a protracted debauch, and was living in a wicked place away down on the West Side. The writer of the letter knew many things concerning father, for things were told in the letter that the general public is not aware of. Somehow, it deceived me. I was to meet the writer at the corner of Eleventh and Bleeker streets, and he promised to take me to my father. I went, and I met the man from whom you saved me. I know I was foolish, and I allowed him to lead me into a trap. He really knew nothing about my father save such things as he had picked up, for he declared father dead."

"And he was the hired tool of some other party."

"I believe so."

"I know it."

"He tried to make me believe Frank Howland paid him to kidnap me, but I knew better than that. There is no reason in the world why Frank should wish such a thing to occur."

"Are you sure of this?"

She started and looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"No more than my question implies."

"Then, I am sure."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"I don't know who to suspect."

She was puzzled by the mystery.

"Has your father ever been a drinking man?"

She hesitated, and he hastened to assure her she need have no fear in letting him know the truth.

"Long, long years ago," she replied, "he drank a great deal; but he reformed."

"He was not given to moderate drinking in secret?"

"No. I once heard him say it would mean his ruin to touch a drop of liquor, as he would be sure to go on a debauch. Once started, he thought he would never recover."

"And that—"

"That is why I thought there might be something in the letter I received."

"Have you preserved that letter?"

"No."

"Too bad! It might have proved of value in tracing down your enemies."

"Do you know where Frank Howland is?"

"I can find him with a little trouble."

"Then I want you to send him to me. Will you be kind enough to do so?"

"I will if he has not been arrested for having a hand in your kidnapping."

"Arrested for that?"

"Yes. At about two o'clock this morning Jack Cable, of the regular force, tried to arrest Howland in my room. Cable and I engaged in a little whirl, while Howland did the vanishing act."

"Such a thing is ridiculous! I will at once inform the police I am quite safe."

Manton shook his head.

"I wouldn't advise you to do anything of the kind."

"Why not?"

"You will aid your enemies to get track of you."

"But I cannot understand why I should be persecuted. What have I done?"

"It's not what you have done, but what they want you to do. They are working for some end, and that end is to obtain possession of your father's wealth, which will fall to you if he is dead."

"But I will not believe him dead—no! no! There is no proof of his death!"

"I acknowledge, and still you must be ready to bear any news that may come. You must be strong."

"I am. Look at me! Most girls would have been completely broken down by what I have passed through in the past two or three days, but I am still brave."

She looked very beautiful then, and Manton did not wonder Frank Howland loved her.

"You are indeed brave," he acknowledged.

Suddenly he fancied he saw some portieres sway slightly as if agitated by some one behind them. With a panther-like spring, he reached the curtains and flung them aside.

The form of Cable, the police spy, was revealed behind them.

"Ha!" cried Manton. "So you were eavesdropping! How did you come there, you rascal?"

He caught Cable by the throat and dragged him into the room, shaking him as a terrier would a rat.

"Let go!" grated the regular. "You hurt!"

"I ought to choke the breath out of your body!" returned the Madison Square Detective. "So you hounded me here and gained admittance by the back way or the basement! You are a sneak, and you know it."

"It is a part of the business."

"If I should give you a good licking, that would be part of the business, and I would do if it we were anywhere but here and in the presence of a lady. It is probable you intimidated the people of the house into letting you in quietly."

"I thought you might be going to meet Howland."

"And you would attempt to arrest him again? Well, you no longer have cause against him."

"Oh, yes, I have."

"How so? Miss Venton is free, and she says he had nothing to do with her abduction."

Cable grinned with satisfaction.

"I don't care anything about that," he asserted. "I am going to take him on another charge."

"What charge?"

"That of having a hand in the murder of Roscoe Venton."

Old Deadsure was astounded.

"Sure a thing is preposterous!" he cried.

"Is it?" sneered Cable. "That's all you know about it! He will have to explain his trips to New York City. He was in the city when Mr. Venton came here, and everything seems to indicate he had a hand in that gentleman's disappearance. You were not shrewd enough to think of that, Manton Burke."

CHAPTER XV.

AN ASTOUNDING ASSERTION.

"THAT is all you know about it," replied the Madison Square Detective. "I may have thought of a great many things. As for you, you are an intruder here. I will show you the door."

Cable glared, but muttered something about it being all right. Without further words, Manton conducted him from the room and to the front door.

"Look here, Cable," he said, "I am not going to have you bothering me. If you keep it up, something will fall on you with a dull thud. Do you understand?"

"I understand you are threatening me."

"I never say anything I do not mean. You ought to be aware of that."

"I have been instructed to work up the Venton case, and I'm bound to do it, for all of you."

"You bucked against me once before."

Cable grunted.

"And you got the worst of it," finished Manton.

"I haven't forgotten."

"Evidently not. You hope to square yourself in some way, and you are apt to tumble down hard. I give you fair warning now. Go."

Old Deadsure opened the door, and Jack Cable passed down the steps.

The Madison Square Detective returned to the room where Doris was awaiting him.

"Is he gone?"

Manton bowed.

"I saw him out."

"I am glad. For some reason, I do not like the appearance of that man. You do not believe there can be the least truth in his charge against Frank?"

"I don't believe it, that is true," agreed Manton. "And still—"

"What?"

He was thinking of young Howland's suspicious actions, but he replied:

"Nothing. He is all right. Why, I have

even taken him into partnership in the task of solving the mystery that hangs over you. We are working to discover what has become of Mr. Venton, and I am sure we will succeed in the end."

"I am also sure."

"I regret Cable has found you, for it will now be impossible to keep your escape a secret. You were strangely fortunate in avoiding pursuers, for I saw two of the ruffians follow you into the alley."

"I knew they were after me, and I dodged into a dark doorway, where I lay quite still until they had passed. Then I arose and followed them. They hurried through the alley to the street beyond, believing I had done likewise. When I reached the street, I turned in the opposite direction from the one chosen by them, and I saw nothing of them afterward."

Old Deadsure complimented her on her bravery and shrewdness, and they talked the matter over for a considerable time. They were finally interrupted by a ring at the door.

When the bell was answered, a young man inquired for Miss Venton, and he said his name was Frank Howland. He was admitted, and in a few minutes the lovers met. Their greetings were somewhat restrained, for a witness was present in the person of Manton Burke.

"How did you know where to find me?" asked Doris, in astonishment.

"Why, I received your note."

"My note?"

"Yes."

"I sent you no note."

"What?"

Frank was amazed.

"I have it here," he cried, producing a tiny envelope and drawing forth a sheet of scented paper. "This is your handwriting."

She caught it from his hand and looked at it searching.

"No," she replied, shaking her head, "it is not mine."

"But—but—"

"I know it looks like mine, but it is a forgery! I never wrote one word of that!"

"Then who did?"

They looked into each other's faces and were silent.

"Let me examine it," requested Manton, and the note was passed to him.

After glancing it over, he said:

"There is something behind this trick, for a trick it surely is."

"What can it mean?"

"Who gave you this?"

"A messenger boy."

"Where were you?"

"In the Morton House."

"Did you question the boy?"

"No. He scuttled the moment he had given me the note."

"I see this is like your handwriting, Miss Venton."

"It is an excellent counterfeit," acknowledged the startled girl.

"Then it was probably written by some one who is familiar with your chirography. It could not have been the work of Cable, for, if he had known how to find you with a messenger, he would have arrested you. If not Cable, it must have been—"

Manton hesitated, as if thinking the situation over carefully.

"If not Cable, who?" eagerly asked Frank.

"I can think of no one but Walter Fielding."

"Why should he send me such a note?"

"That is something I am not ready to answer."

"I will answer it myself," said a voice beyond the portieres, and Fielding stepped boldly into the room. "I wished to confront this fellow before my cousin and show her just the kind of a creature he is."

Frank's face flushed with anger.

"Have a care, Fielding!" he cried. "I am not ready to stand a great deal from you!"

"Oh-ho!" sneered Walt. "You may not be ready, but you may have to stand it, just the same. I followed you here after you bit at the decoy note, and now I propose to show you in your true colors. You are a dastardly wretch, and you know it!"

The color left Frank's face, and by

growing deathly pale, he showed he was thoroughly aroused. Clinching his fists, he advanced on his accuser.

"Take back those words, or prove them!" he cried.

"All right," was the cool retort. "I'll prove them."

Old Deadsure's hand fell on the arm of the angry young man.

"Go slow," cautioned the detective. "Remember Miss Venton is present, and there is no reason why you should lower yourself by a battle with this person."

"Wa al, by Jawvel!" gasped Walt, adjusting his eyeglasses and staring hard at Manton. "This is really amusing, don't yaw know! A common servant of the law calling a gentleman a 'person!' Haw!"

For a moment or two, Fielding had dropped his affected manner and speech, but he now assumed once more the air of snobbish tolerance that was both amusing and disgusting to the detective.

It was, indeed, a difficult thing for Frank Howland to hold himself in check after having been so boldly insulted by his enemy, but Manton's fingers gripped his arm like bands of steel, and the detective murmured in his ear.

"Let him play his cards, if you are innocent of wrong-doing. He can't hurt you, and he will expose his hand. That will show us how to meet him."

Frank realized there was good sound sense in this advice, and he paused, his eyes still glaring at Fielding, who seemed quite cool and confident.

"What you have said amounts to nothing, Fielding," declared Manton. "Any man can make charges against another, but it is sometimes difficult to substantiate them. You say Howland is a dastardly wretch, but that doesn't amount to a little bit. Give us your proof."

"Let him tell why he came to New York so often," said the accuser. "He dawsen't, don't yaw know."

"I don't see what that has to do with this affair," cut in Frank.

"Of cawse you don't!" sneered Walt. "If you will tell the truth, othaw people may see what it has to do with the matter, just the same."

"This is nonsense! I—"

"You won't tell? Oh, well, I knew you wouldn't. Perhaps you want me to tell faw you?"

"You do not know."

"That's where you are mistaken, deah boy. I do know."

Unconsciously Frank fell back a step, appearing startled, not to say alarmed.

"Look at him!" cried Walt, pointing at his rival. "You can see I struck him where it is tender, don't yaw know."

In a moment, Frank flung off his appearance of alarm, smiling scornfully into the face of the other.

"What you have said is still valueless," he asserted. "Will you be good enough to tell why I came to New York so often?"

"You came to see a female!"

"Ah!"

"You cannot deny it! It was a woman who lured you here so frequently! See! Look at his face! It is as good as a confession, by Jawve!"

It was plainly seen Fielding's shot had struck home, for Frank betrayed himself. Old Deadsure was astounded, and Doris gave a cry of pain.

"Oh, Frank! Frank!" she exclaimed. "Is this true—can it be?"

At first he turned his head away, and then he straightened himself proudly and boldly.

"It is true," he acknowledged. "Now let this man tell the entire facts. Who is this woman I came to see?"

"She is here!"

A female figure stepped in through the parted portieres and faced the little assembly. She had once been very beautiful, and some would have called her beautiful still; but there was a certain dash and abandon about her that told the class to which she belonged. She was elegantly dressed in the very height of fashion, and, although it was yet early in the forenoon, magnificent diamonds blazed from her bosom and golden hooks held pure white stones attached to her shapely ears. What most marred her beauty was the fact that certain hard lines had formed around

her mouth. It is strange, but women of her level can almost always be told by the look about their mouths.

For a moment after her entrance, dead silence reigned in the room.

Then Frank Howland asked, as if in wonder:

"Who are you?"

The woman threw back her head and laughed. There was no music in the sound.

"As if you do not know! You are playing a big bluff, but it won't go with this crowd—not a bit. Do you want me to tell these people who I am?"

"Yes."

"Well then, *I am your wife!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S APPEAL.

DEAD silence followed this astounding declaration, and it seemed as if every one who heard it had been stricken dumb with amazement.

The strange woman was smiling triumphantly, while there was a sneer on the face of Walt Fielding. Horror and astonishment were written on the face of Doris Venton, and Frank Howland seemed too astounded to make a move.

The eyes of Manton Burke roved swiftly from face to face, as if he were reading the truth on the countenances he saw.

The assertion of the unknown woman had indeed proved a thunderbolt.

She was the first to speak. Throwing back her head, she laughed again.

"You are playing your part very well, my dear husband!" she sneered. "But I do not believe your counterfeit astonishment deceives any one."

Frank would have advanced on her, but Old Deadsure's hand detained him once more. However, the detective was not able to check the hot words which burst from the lips of the accused.

"Miserable creature!" he cried. "So you have made yourself a tool of this dastard who is trying to ruin my good name!"

"Haw!" contemptuously exclaimed Fielding. "You nevah had a good name to ruin, don't yah know. Made yourself quite a swell in Buffalo, but you didn't fool anybody anywhere else."

"You cur! But for the presence of a lady, I would cram those words down your throat!"

The eyes of the strange woman flashed.

"I am glad you recognize me as a lady," she exclaimed; "but I shouldn't think your female friend here would appreciate being ignored in such a manner."

This was spoken in a most insulting way, and Frank's blood fairly boiled.

"Steady, lad!" again cautioned Manton, feeling the young fellow's arm quiver. "A scrap with these people will only make matters worse. Let them have plenty of rope. It is possible they will hang themselves."

It was well the cool detective was there to restrain the hot-headed youngster, otherwise Frank would have done something that he would have regretted afterward.

"I swore to get even with you when you scorned me last time and said you would have nothing more to do with me," went on the unknown woman. "You told me to go back to my old companions and the streets! I saw your disgust written on your face. You did not tell me you had another whom you cared more for, but I suspected as much. I made up my mind to find out where you stayed when you were away so much. You pretended to be traveling for a dry goods concern, but I did not believe you. I tried to trace you, but you gave me the slip. By a rare accident I learned the truth, and I hastened here to let this girl know the kind of a man you are."

This was delivered with a readiness and apparent earnestness that seemed to indicate she spoke the truth. If not that, then her lesson was well learned.

Being totally unprepared for this, Frank knew not how to meet it, and his doubt and hesitation seemed to put him at a disadvantage.

"Yesterday," continued the woman, "I learned you were trying to deceive this unfortunate girl, who is foolish enough to believe in your honor. Her cousin told me the whole story, and I agreed to open her eyes and baffle you in your vile plot. That is

why I am here. If she has anything further to do with you, she will do so after having been warned. I've let her in, and she's dead onto you. It is a square deal from now out."

The accused turned appealingly to Doris.

"You cannot believe this—this woman?" he cried. "I swear there is not one atom of truth in her statements!"

Like a cat, the strange woman came close upon him, her voice rising harshly:

"You swear that? Do you mean to throw me cold right here? If that's your little game, I'll have you pulled, Herbert Drake, or Frank Howland, as I believe you now call yourself! Do you understand—I'll have you pulled!"

She shook her clinched hands in his face, her full and sensuous lips being drawn back from her milk-white teeth, while her dark eyes fairly blazed. She was beautiful then, but her beauty was that of an enraged tigress. If she were acting, then she was certainly skilled in the art, for her manner seemed most natural.

The situation was a dramatic one, and the grouping of the characters would have made a telling stage picture.

No thought of this entered the mind of any one present. Old Deadsure was coolly watching all that passed, his manner betraying not the least emotion.

Walt Fielding stood with his hands in his pockets, a look of intense satisfaction on his rather handsome face, for he fully believed everything was coming his way, and he could ask no more.

Doris had clasped her hands, the troubled, pained and frightened look on her face growing deeper with each moment.

"Wretched woman!" exclaimed Frank Howland, falling back a step; "I do not know you! I never saw you before to-day in all my life!"

That seemed to arouse the one addressed to a still more intense fury.

"You lie, and you know it!" she hissed.

"You may as well acknowledge the truth, for your game is blocked. Why, if you persist in the attempt to throw me over for another, *I'll kill you!*"

It was not easy to doubt her intense earnestness, but still Frank repulsed her. He seemed equally in earnest.

"I do not know you," he repeated.

Old Deadsure stepped in.

"If this young man is your husband, you will be able to prove it," said the detective.

The woman was silent.

"Of course she can prove it," put in Fielding. "She—"

"You were not spoken to, sir!" came sternly from the ferret's lips. "When I wish to hear from you, I will take care to let you know it."

"Haw! Really! Well, you may have to hear from me when you don't want to, don't yaw know. If I take a notion, I'll talk when I please."

The detective turned squarely and flashed a look from his magnetic eyes upon Walt, who shrunk and recoiled instantly, as if before a blow.

Then Manton turned on the woman again.

"Can you prove this man is your husband? Where is the marriage-certificate?"

"He destroyed it."

"Ah! There is probably a record of the marriage?"

"It was a secret one."

The detective lifted his eyebrows.

"This grows interesting!" he declared. "How about the person who performed the ceremony?"

"He is dead."

"The interest deepens. How about the witnesses?"

"I can find one of them."

Manton drew a deep breath.

"That is really surprising! I almost fancied you would be unable to produce the least proof of the marriage. But the evidence of a single witness may be unavailing."

"I can prove we have lived as man and wife."

"That comes nearer amounting to something."

"I can also prove he has registered me at hotels as his wife."

Manton scowled.

"If this is true, you have something of a

case, as he has publicly acknowledged the attachment."

Frank broke in:

"It is not true—how can you believe such lies?"

"Steady, boy! I have not admitted such a belief. In fact, I am quite accustomed to deal with *blackmailers!*"

With that word, he again turned to Walt Fielding, whose eyes refused to meet those of the detective.

The woman, however, did not seem startled in the least, although a change had come over her face. She was now looking at Frank in a sad and pleading manner, and her hand trembled a little, as she extended it to him, murmuring:

"Herbert!"

He drew back.

"Don't shrink from me that way, Herbert!" she cried, her voice breaking in a sob. "I am ready and willing to live with you again, and I will try to be a good and faithful wife. I will give up all my old companions, and desert my way of living forever. I am sure we might be happy if you would trust me and love me as you did once—I am sure!"

He fell back from her, and she dropped on her knees before him, holding up her hands pleadingly, while she went on:

"Don't be too hard on me, Herbert! When you learned about my past, you turned from me, but I have always hoped you would come back again, for I love you!—I love you! If you scorn me now, I shall plunge into the old life again, for that is the only way I can forget! God knows what will become of me! If I am an outcast, scorned and despised, it will be because you refused to give me a chance to lead a better life!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FIELDING TRIUMPHANT.

THE beautiful woman's appeal seemed most touching and pitiful, and her sincerity and earnestness seemed intense. The one on whom it had the most effect was Doris, for the young girl was strongly moved by the words to which she listened.

Frank Howland, however, seemed to have gained control of himself, and he was gazing scornfully at the kneeling figure. On him the woman's words had not the slightest effect.

She saw this, and it seemed that her heart was pierced as with a keen knife, for she uttered a sharp cry, covering her face with her hands.

"Don't look at me that way, Herbert!" she entreated. "It will kill me! You cannot blame me for coming here. I could not bear to have you marry another while I still remained your rightful wife. I know I have made mistakes—I confess it! But is there no such a thing as forgiveness for a woman? A man may go wrong and still be given a show if he will turn about, but a woman is forever condemned."

She was sobbing as if her heart would break, still remaining on her knees.

Old Deadsure had folded his arms, but he was watching every move and drinking in every word.

"You had better get up," said Frank Howland, with deliberation. "Your scheme will not work with me, if it is money you are after, for I am not to be robbed in such a way."

It seemed that the sound of his voice brought her to a sense of her position.

She suddenly started up.

"So you refuse to forgive and forget?" she asked.

"I do not know you."

"Well, I know you! You have robbed me of my one last hope, and I guess Satan will get me now! All right! But you shall not succeed! I'll drag you down, if it is my last act on earth!"

"Spare your threats. I do not fear you."

"You shall fear me!"

Once more she had changed. She was now fury impersonated, for she was a woman scorned.

"Make an end of this scene!" cried Frank. "You have utterly failed, and now you had better go. Otherwise I may take a notion to call the police and turn you over to them."

"I dare you to do that!" she almost screamed. "You cannot—you dare not. I

would place you in a tight box if you tried it."

He flung out one hand.

"You are still trying threats. Can't you see you have made a failure in your wretched game, whatever it was?"

"Have I made a failure? I fancy this girl's faith in you is not as strong as it once was. Try her! try her! See if she believes in you now!"

At this Doris had shrunk away. Governed by a sudden impulse, Frank turned to her, saying:

"Doris!"

Her eyes refused to meet his.

"My God!" he cried, taking a step toward her. "It cannot be you believe the words of this abandoned woman! I swear to you they are false!"

And the woman exclaimed:

"I swear to you they are true!"

"Will you believe her oath or mine?"

"Choose between us!"

"Yes, choose!"

Again there was a striking tableau.

Doris was silent.

Had she looked at Frank she would have seen the intense agony and suspense which he was passing through, but she still kept her eyes averted.

"Mr. Howland, I will believe you when you clear your name of the suspicion cast upon it," she said, steadying her voice. "Just now I know not what to believe."

It happened that Old Deadsure was looking at Walt Fielding as these words were spoken, and the detective saw a leer of triumph on the face of Doris Venton's designing cousin. That look seemed to tell him a great deal, for he nodded his head with satisfaction.

The moment he recovered somewhat from the shock he had received, Frank Howland cried:

"The plot has succeeded very well; but this woman shall suffer! The police shall be called, and—"

Once more Manton Burke was at the speaker's side and once more the grasp of those iron fingers checked the hot words.

"Softly! softly! Could you prove your position if you should call the police? Don't be so fast, young man. This woman had better be turned away with a warning that will give her a chance to think the matter over before she tries to press the charge. Leave it to me."

It was with difficulty he induced Frank to listen, but the young man understood the detective was astute in matters of this character, and he finally decided to trust him in this case.

"I advise you to get out of here without delay, young woman," said Manton, coldly facing Frank's accuser. "You evidently are not at this time prepared to substantiate any of your charges, and the best thing you can do is keep in the background until you can do this. When you bring proof positive, your charges will amount to something. Until then, they are of no value."

She tossed back her head and was about to make a scornful retort, but her gaze met that of his squarely, and it seemed that something robbed her lips of the words they would have spoken. She hesitated but a moment, and then she bowed, murmuring:

"Very well, I'll go; but I shall be seen again."

Then she turned and passed through the parted portieres.

The three persons within the room stood quite still until they heard the front door close behind her retreating form, and then Frank suddenly started:

"All this is wrong—wrong! She is going away, and the cloud of suspicion is still hanging over me! She must not go!"

He darted after her.

Muttering something, Manton followed.

When Frank reached the sidewalk, he saw a cab rolling away, but the woman was not in view in either direction.

"She has escaped me!" he hoarsely exclaimed.

"Let her go," advised Manton, at his elbow. "I know where to find her, and I will trace her history. That is the only way to deal with this matter. If I had not known how to do it, she would not have departed."

In a few moments Frank was convinced, but he was determined on returning to the

house and speaking with Doris again, for he could not realize she doubted him. When he rang the bell, however, no one answered. Again and again he rang, but still the door remained closed.

"Come away," advised Old Deadsure. "Walt Fielding holds high cards just now, and you must wait your turn. If you are all right, that turn will come."

Frank was finally led away, but he had the aspect of a man who has met a crushing defeat.

At about two o'clock that afternoon, an old lady who wore glasses and whose clothes denoted straitened circumstances, if not absolute poverty, got off the Elevated train at Bleeker street and South Fifth avenue. The old woman did not appear like a person of refinement. Instead, she had a rather vulgar air, as if all her life had been spent even beneath the middle strata of society.

Without the least hesitation, this old lady hurried along the dirty street, the noisy trains rumbling over her head and the hurrying pedestrians jostling rudely against her. Denizens of Bleeker street have little respect for age, as a usual thing, although exceptions may be found, of course.

It was not long before the old lady reached some steps that led downward to a basement door. Even as she halted at the top of the steps, a gaudily dressed, bedizened creature hurried past and plunged recklessly downward, disappearing behind a swinging door.

The old woman hesitated no longer, but descended the steps with the caution of age and infirmities kept well in mind. She pushed open the door and entered.

When the door had closed behind her, she found herself in a gas-lighted cubby-hole, not much larger than the average hall bedroom. A long narrow table extended almost the whole length of the room, and on each side of it were ranged eight chairs—sixteen in all.

Every chair was occupied by a woman.

On the table was a stone jug, and this was partly filled with water. There was not a sign of glass or cup to drink from, and so, when any of the patrons of the place grew thirsty, they tipped up the jug and drank directly from it.

The air was foul and stifling, for there seemed to be no proper ventilation, and the smell of tobacco and stale beer came from beyond a partition. Beyond this partition could be heard a babel of masculine voices, but in the place the old woman had entered there was only one man, and he was a low-browed, evil-looking creature.

The women within the place represented various ages, nationalities and grades of degradation, for nearly all of them seemed abandoned and dissolute. Some were decked in more or less costly finery, but on the face of almost every one was the hard look that tells of a warped conscience.

This was a so-called "Ladies' Pool Room," where women could go and play the races, for women in New York City are addicted to race-track gambling as well as men. On the table were printed slips which were to be filled out by the female gamblers, and which authorized the "commission agents" to send to the race-track whatever sums of money the writer desired, the money to be placed on horses named in filling out the slips.

Not one cent of this money went to the track, for this was simply a dodge to circumvent the police and get beyond the grasp of the law.

On the opposite side of the thin board partition was the men's pool-room. To the ears of the women came occasional bits of "horsey" talk, mingled with the clicking of the ticker that recorded the progress of the racing at Guttenburg. At intervals a stentorian voice was lifted to tell changes in the odds or announce the progress and results of a race.

As the old lady entered, a chair was vacated by one of the female gamblers, and she quickly dropped into it.

At her elbow sat the bold and dashing accuser of Frank Howland.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRICK EXPOSED.

That the old lady was a new patron of the place soon became evident, for she was

watched with some interest by the regular frequenters, and when she gave a dollar to the low-browed messenger and told him to place it on Dasher, a dozen voices cried:

"Know anything about Dasher?"

This seemed to confuse her somewhat, but she replied:

"I was told he was sure of taking third place, at least."

"How do you play him?"

"One, two, three."

"What's the odds?"

"Twenty to one."

Immediately nearly every woman around the table placed money on Dasher, and the tough messenger gathered up the orders and the dollars and departed. He soon returned with printed cards, according to which it seemed that the Turf Commission Company had faithfully executed the orders intrusted to it.

There was a buzz of voices on every side, the women indulging in race track gossip about horses, jockeys, and other matters. Some told of "sure tips" they had received, and some related how their tips had proved worthless. Old races were discussed, it was said a lately-defeated favorite "couldn't have lost if he'd been out for the stuff," and another horse was "pulled off his feet," and so forth.

In a quiet way the old lady fell into conversation with the dashing woman at her right, who was addressed as Flo by several of the others. She seemed to have plenty of money, which she was venturing in a reckless manner.

"I don't come here often," she laughed. "Generally have a messenger of my own to send to the pool rooms; but I felt just like getting in here with the gang to-day. I've got a big roll, and I'm bound to blow it—or make more."

"You have been playing in luck lately," ventured the old lady.

Flo threw back her head and laughed.

"That's what I have," she declared; "but not on the horses. The beasts have been picking my pockets right along, but I get 'em filled in another direction. Made a big strike yesterday. Had to run a bluff and do lots of emotional biz, such as flopping down on my knees and boo-hooing, but the duck who put up the stuff said I did it out of sight. I'm a corker at that sort of thing; used to be on the stage, you know."

"No, I did not know."

"Well, that's a straight tip. Played emotional parts, and I got great notices. Papers said I was out of sight, a second Bernhardt, and all that stuff. It was great for a while, but I got sick of it and pulled out under the wing of a young sport with more money than brains. I helped him spend his money, and I was pretty well down on my luck till I struck this angel who was willing to pay me big for a little game of bluff."

The old lady seemed deeply interested, and her eyes glittered behind the spectacles, but she did not venture to ask too many questions. Of her own accord, the dashing woman told how her companions called her Fancy Flo, because she could dress so lavishly and wear so many diamonds.

"When I get more money than I need, I put it into stones," she explained. "It's the best thing to do, for one can always get nearest face value on stones, if it is necessary to soak 'em. Hello! There goes the race! Now we'll see about Dasher."

From the other room a stentorian voice was heard crying:

"Close the second at the Gut! They're at the post!"

At once a silence fell over the patrons of the place, and looks of suspense and eagerness were on every face. The clicking of the ticker and the hoarse breathing of some of the gamblers broke the silence. The voice went on:

"They're off! Nemo in the lead; all the others bunched."

Then came another brief pause, after which the voice continued:

"At the quarter—Myra first, Nemo second, Dasher third."

There was an immediate flutter of delight in the room. Dasher had won third place at an early stage of the race, and it seemed as if he might hold it.

"Dasher wins!"

"We're in it this time!"

"Hurrah for Dasher!"

The women were excited, but the strange old lady sat quite still and waited the result.

"At the half—Myra first, Dasher second, Roxy third."

Now the excitement was intense. Dasher second at "the half" seemed to settle it.

"In the stretch—Myra by a length, Roxy second, Get There third. Dasher off his feet."

In a moment it seemed that the hopes of the women had been dashed to earth, and many exclamations of dismay were heard. Then all fell to listening intently.

Click click, click-i-ty-click, click, rattled the ticker in an adjoining room.

And then—

"Roxy wins! Get There second! Dasher third!"

There was a wild burst of enthusiasm. Dasher had recovered enough to shut Myra out by a nose at the wire, and the women who had played him one, two, three were winners. It seemed that every single one of them, excepting the old lady, was on her feet crying for her money.

"What's der matter wid yer?" growled the low-browed messenger. "Can't yer wait till der race is run? You'll git yer money all right."

On every side the old lady was congratulated and admired, for it was believed she possessed "inside information." She was still the least excited of them all.

Fancy Flo laughed.

"You're right in it with this gang now," she declared. "I guess you know your biz."

It was useless for the old lady to protest it was a great surprise to her, as she had not expected to win, for all of the tip received.

"You had better go into business as a tout," said Flo.

"What is a tout?" asked the old lady.

"Don't you know? Why, a tout is one who gives tips and has a share of the winnings. There isn't any risk, and one can make lots of wealth, if sharp enough."

"Do women do this?"

"Sure! I know lots of 'em. There's Pedigree Madge, why she has the record of every horse on the turf and can tell you all about the stock the animals come from. She must make on an average at least twenty-five dollars a day. Sometimes she pulls out two or three times as much, and sometimes she doesn't get a red. But she can't lose. That's the best part of it, though one doesn't get the fun of betting. It's the excitement that make me follow the races. I wouldn't give a hurrah for it all if there wasn't a chance to lose as well as win."

The messenger took the winning tickets and secured the cash on them, which each woman eagerly counted as she received it.

"That's the first general haul to-day," declared one.

The next race was soon on, and the gamblers were inclined to follow the example of the old lady once more, although she asserted she knew no more about the horses concerned than they did. This was evident when the one she selected was easily disengaged.

She improved her opportunities to talk with Fancy Flo as often as possible.

"My duck has promised me more money," Flo laughed. "But I've got to keep out of sight after he succeeds in his little game. I'm willing. Let him send me to Paris if he wants me to keep quiet. If he wins, I'll bleed him anyhow. It's a bold move, and we may both get pinched," though I've had good luck in not being arrested up to date. I stand in with a big cop, and he puts me on where there's danger."

She seemed to consider the old lady as "shady," and some words the woman of the spectacles had let fall were enough to warrant her in the belief.

"Then you might be arrested?" questioned the old woman.

"I suppose so. There aren't many of us but could have a charge put up against us. I suppose some people might call my bluff blackmail, but it isn't that kind of a drive. I am engaged to do my work for pay, and I don't expect to get a red from the chap who gets let down."

"What if he offers to buy you off?"

Flo looked keenly at the woman.

"Blessed if you don't seem interested!" She drew herself up, as if suddenly suspicious.

"I am," nodded the wearer of the spectacles. "People have to live in New York, and I want to find out all the ways of turning a dollar."

"Well, you've begun late in life, if you aren't on now. I don't know what to make of you. Guess I've been chinning too much. It's a bad way I have sometimes, and it'll get me into trouble some of these days."

"It may," nodded the old woman. "I've known talking to do one a heap of harm."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Flo, her suspicion increasing.

"Just what I said."

"Well, I haven't blowed anything to you that'll count."

"Do you think so?"

"Have I?"

"What if I know the parties you are dealing with?"

"You don't."

"There is no way you can be sure of that."

"If you do, you came here to spy on me!"

Fancy Flo had grown so excited she unconsciously lifted her voice, attracting the attention of all the women.

It happened that the messenger was out of the room just then, but he returned in a few moments.

"Looker here," he cried. "I jest got a tip from der outside. If any of youse gals have been up ter liftin' somet'in', you'd best look sharp, fer dere's a detective in here in disguise."

This announcement was received with little shrieks of surprise and dismay.

Fancy Flo sprung to her feet.

"Here's the detective!" she cried, tearing the spectacles from the old woman's face.

"I'm dead onto him now! He's known all over as Old Deadsure!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FRISCO JIM STRIKES.

OLD DEADSURE it really was!

Disguised as an old woman, he had visited the pool-room for the purpose of finding out about Fancy Flo, and he had succeeded to his entire satisfaction.

But the exposure put him in a humiliating plight.

However, the fact that he was a detective seemed to frighten one-half of the women, who had, without doubt, committed some petty crimes, if nothing more serious.

The low-browed messenger was, with the exception of Fancy Flo, the only one who did not appear awed. He clinched his fists and started for the disguised detective.

"So dis is yer game, cul!" he cried.

"Well, I'll punch yer head so youse—"

Deadsure had arisen to his feet, and he now turned the battery of his flashing, magnetic eyes on the tough. The fellow was startled.

"Holy Jim!" he cried. "I've seen dem eyes afore!"

"You are right, Copper Riley," was the stern reply. "I am Manton Burke, and I had the pleasure of sending you up once on a time."

"Great jucks! I don't wanter monkey wid youse, fer you're a fighter, but yer gotter git outer here. Dis place is only fer der ladies. See?"

"I am going, my dear Copper."

"Not till I get a dig at those eyes!" cried Fancy Flo, as she tried to strike the detective in the face. "You can't come spying on me!"

The messenger caught her by the arm, growling:

"Let up on dat! I don't 'low no scrapin' in dis place."

Old Deadsure laughed, readjusted his spectacles and tripped lightly up the stairs, leaving the strange gambling room behind.

Just as he reached the street, he heard a sneering voice say:

"Well, I spoiled your little trick that time!"

Then he saw Jack Cable leering at him.

Those who were passing witnessed a singular spectacle a moment later. The clinched hand of an old woman shot out with amazing suddenness, and a man was struck fairly between the eyes. The man was sent sprawl-

ing into the street, while the old lady hastened on and disappeared up the steps that led to the Bleecker street Elevated station.

Cable gathered himself up, snarling and vowed vengeance. He had indeed spoiled Manton's trick in a measure by exposing him in the men's pool room, but the detective had more than made himself square with that blow.

Deadsure was keenly satisfied with the result of his visit to the pool room, for he was now certain Walt Fielding was playing a desperate game for the possession of his cousin's hand and his uncle's fortune.

Fancy Flo had played very successfully the part laid out for her by the scheming rascal, for she was, indeed, something of a genius in her way.

Her great failing was an irrepressible inclination to talk too much at times, and Manton had come upon her at one of those times. As a result, she had told him just what he most desired to know.

In the detective's mind Frank Howland was cleared of the charge against him. He could not doubt the young man had spoken the truth when he swore he never saw the dashing adventuress previous to the meeting in the presence of Doris.

But the woman had played her *role* so well that the girl who loved Frank had been led to doubt him. Fielding had been triumphant for the time.

All this work was taking time, and Manton realized he was making poor progress in solving the mystery of Madison Square. For a while he had been taken from the case entirely, but he resolved to pick it up again without delay.

Going at once to his hotel, he removed his disguise and came forth as Manton Burke, for he had resolved to visit Doris without delay and warn her against Fielding. He wondered if she would be shrewd enough to play a part that would deceive the scheming rascal by making him believe she thought him all right and was still suspicious of Frank Howland.

But he was scarcely prepared for the information he received when he reached the house where he left Doris in the morning.

She was gone! She had left the place for good, and they knew nothing about where she had gone. Yes, she went away in a cab, and her cousin had accompanied her.

"He is playing the trick for all there is in it," thought Old Deadsure, as he hastened back to the hotel. "It seems as if this dodging about is a part of a plot to keep me from pushing the investigation of Venton's vanishing. I trust she is all right this time and will communicate with me soon, for I am not going to spend time in searching for her. Instead of that, I'll get after McGath, for I believe that crook knows something that might prove of importance."

When he was in his room again he made another change. It was a decidedly tough-looking customer who came out and left the hotel. He wore a silk hat that was tipped over one eye, his necktie was bright blue, and his pantaloons of the checker-board order, with immense "springs" in the bottom of the legs. He was puffing at a huge black cigar, and the expression of his face was that of a Bowery tough.

Manton had decided to seek McGath in the locality he knew the crook would be likely to frequent if driven into seclusion. Proceeding to this quarter, he moved from place to place, seeming to drink in each saloon, but in reality not touching a drop of the vile liquor.

By the time the detective reached McGinty's Hole, one of the most disreputable West Side dives, he seemed to be quite intoxicated. A crowd was continually hanging about McGinty's, and four out of five of the loungers had "done time." It was a wonder the police allowed the place to run unmolested, but the proprietor often boasted he had a "pull."

Manton talked like a race-track sport who had struck a streak of luck, and he was remarkably free in setting out drinks, which made him popular with McGinty's "patrons."

"Pulled out a scoop on Roxy," he declared. "Had a straight tip, an' loaded der old gal fer a hundred. Got ten ter one! Whoop! Dat's der way ter scoop der stuff."

Say, ever'body—hic—have 'nother drink with me."

He even made a desperate attempt to sing a topical song, but he got the words mixed and the tune wrong, and he finally gave it up.

As long as he was inclined to spend money freely, he was a privileged character, and he strolled unceremoniously into the little back room that was kept for special customers and "ladies."

Just as he entered, he heard a voice say:

"Now you must know I'm Frisco Jim. The whole Pacific Coast thinks Dalgren the sheriff shot me in Yreka, but Dalgren killed a poor cuss who happened to be my double. That let me out. I had a big black record against me west of the Rockies, and so I came this way."

Manton entered boldly.

"Frisco Jim!" he cried, staring at the speaker, and then starting back. "Holy smoke! Dat can't be old Jim!"

Like a flash a revolver appeared in the hand of one of two men who sat at a little table, and Manton was covered. The man who held the revolver wore a big black beard, and was decidedly fierce in aspect.

"Who the howling blazes are you?" he demanded, his white teeth gleaming in the midst of his beard. "I don't know you."

"Don't shoot!" called the detective, flinging up his hands. "You oughter know me, if yer don't."

Manton saw, with satisfaction, that Frisco Jim's companion was Ben McGath.

"Well, I don't know you," asserted the California crook. "What's your handle?"

"Why, I'm Nipper Dave."

"Don't know you now."

"I was in Frisco two years ago an' drank wid yer at Crowley's Bar. I gave yer a tip on Maggie Such, an' yer played her ter win. She took der first money, an' yer blowed me off in great shape dat night. I was down on me luck, but you let me have twenty, and dat put me on me feet, fer I struck a bank dat night an' bu'sted it wide. I guess you remember me now."

Frisco Jim seemed doubtful, but Manton had spoken with such readiness that the Pacific desperado was convinced. He lowered his weapon.

"I don't seem to place you now, pard," he declared; "but you appear to be giving me a square deal. Come, sit down."

Old Deadsure did not hesitate about accepting the invitation, for it was exactly what he wanted. He slipped into a seat at the table, saying:

"Struck a great streak on Roxy to-day. Had a safe pointer, and I stuck up a clean hundred dat she'd take first. Got ten to one, and der old girl swept der board. I'm a clean t'ousan' ahead, an' dat makes me feel like blowin' off all der game coves I meet."

He struck the bell on the table with his hand, and when the waiter appeared, he gave an order for wine. This was soon brought, and he filled the glasses of his companions.

McGath had scarcely spoken since Manton's appearance, but he readily swallowed his portion of the wine.

The detective could not be deceived by a false beard, and he soon discovered the whiskers on Frisco Jim's face were artificial.

"Seems ter me you have changed in two years a pile," observed Manton, looking sharp at the Californian. "W'en I saw yer yet didn't have no whiskers."

"I found it convenient to have some, partner," was Jim's retort. "Were you ever taken that way?"

"Never 'cept w'en der perlice were arter me one time. I put on a false rig den an' fooled dem all."

Baltimore Ben arose to his feet and stretched his arms above his head. The next moment he flung himself on Manton, catching the detective's wrists and jerking them behind the back of the chair.

"It's a pretty slick game, Burke!" he hissed; "but you can't disguise those eyes from me! They give you dead away!"

Then, to Frisco Jim:

"Show yer nerve here! This is a detective after me! If you're Frisco Jim you'll give him the knife!"

"Then he gets the knife, pard!"

A big bowie appeared in the Western desperado's hand, and he struck straight at Old Deadsure's throat.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MESMERIC EYE.

The blow would have ended Manton Burke's life, but, like a flash, McGath jerked the detective's chair backward.

Down came the knife, cutting a long slit in Deadsure's coat, but not touching his flesh. It was one of the close shaves of his life.

"Good!" exclaimed Baltimore Ben. "You are all right, Frisco Jim; though you came nearer getting in your work than I intended. It won't do to wipe out this fellow here. Help—"

He needed help, for, though held in such an awkward position, the detective was on the point of breaking from McGath's grasp.

"Give him a soaker, but not with the knife!" hissed Ben. "On the head! on the head!"

The next moment something seemed to burst into Manton's brain, and he fell forward limply—unconscious!

He had been struck a terrible blow with a sand-bag.

"Good!" guardedly exclaimed Baltimore Ben. "You are right handy at this business, Frisco Jim."

"I have done enough of it in my time," was the reply. "What are you going to do with the galoot now?"

"We must take him out of here somehow."

"Does the proprietor stand in with you?"

"Sure."

"And is there a back alley?"

"Yes."

"Then you are all right."

It was now near night, and they decided not to take Old Deadsure out of the saloon until after dark. However, they took good care to secure his feet and hands and gag him. Then McGath reported to the proprietor.

"Holy ghost!" gasped McGinty. "Can't keep that feller in that shape in that room! Why, somebody might come in and want to use the room. Git him inter the cellar."

This they were able to do secretly, and McGath breathed easier when the task was completed.

"There's a back door from the cellar," he explained. "We'll take him out that way, as it opens right into the alley."

When Manton came to his senses he found himself in a dark, ill-smelling hole. His jaws ached, and there was a roaring sound in his head.

It was not long before the two men lifted the detective and carried him from the cellar into the back alley, for night had come on.

After making sure he was securely bound, Manton took it as gracefully as possible, knowing how useless it would be to struggle.

They carried him for some distance along the alley, and, luckily for them, no one paid any attention to them, if, indeed, they were seen at all.

Down some slippery steps and in at a dark doorway the detective was carried. Finally he was dumped down on a hard floor.

The sound thus made seemed to arouse some one who was sleeping in the room, for there was a stir, and a voice asked:

"Is it you, Ben?"

"Yes."

"This is cursed hard luck!" retorted the voice. "I don't like the idea of playing the sneak again, just after we have been living on the top of the town and stopping at the hotels; but I suppose it'll have to go till after the police—"

"I have two visitors with me, Charley."

"The blazes you have!"

Up to his feet sprung the unseen speaker.

"Who are they?" he asked.

"All right," half-laughed McGath. "One is a friend, and the other is trussed up so tight he can't hurt. Strike a light."

A match suddenly flared up, and then a lamp was lighted. This light revealed a bare room in which there was scarcely a piece of furniture, the bed in the corner being on the floor.

Cool Hand Charley was standing beside a staggering table on which sat the lamp.

"Who is this?" he asked, looking suspiciously at Frisco Jim.

McGath explained.

"But Frisco Jim is dead—he was killed," asserted Charley.

"So reported, partner," calmly said the man from California. "It was said Sheriff Dalgren killed me in Yreka, but that was a big mistake. He killed my double."

"He has proved himself all right," assured Ben, noticing the doubtful look on his pal's face. "He would have knifed Old Deadsure if I hadn't saved the detective."

"Saved him!" echoed Charley, in amazement. "What in the world did you save him for?"

"So we might put him out of the way without making a mess of it. Here he is"—touching Manton with his foot.

The Cool Hand started back. He had not noticed Deadsure before.

"What in the world did you bring him here for?" he asked.

"Because it was the best thing to do."

"What do you propose to do with him now?"

"What are we liable to do with him?"

"Put him where he won't bother us any more."

"Sure."

There were some broken chairs in the room, and the three men sat down to discuss the fate of the helpless prisoner.

Manton knew his situation was critical in the extreme, for these men were utterly conscienceless, and they would hesitate at no crime that could serve them.

The detective now felt sure that McGath and Roberts were concerned in the mystery he had set himself to solve, and his ready mind conceived they were the two men seen by the policeman just before the storm on the night the body was found in Madison Square. The man with them, who seemed to be intoxicated, was the one who had died in the Square.

Unless the man was murdered, why were McGath and Roberts so worked up over the affair?

While Manton was thinking this over, he decided the dead man was the one seen in company with Roscoe Venton on the New York Central Railroad.

But what had become of Venton?

That portion of the mystery remained as deep and baffling as ever.

Venton's protracted silence seemed to indicate that he was dead.

After the three crooks had been talking guardedly for a few moments, McGath sprung up, stepped to where the detective lay and knelt by his side. Then his nimble fingers swiftly searched the helpless man's pockets, removing everything found therein.

With his plunder, the crook returned to the table, and there everything he had seized was critically examined. A cry of surprise broke from McGath's lips when he found the mutilated dispatch which the railroad conductor had given Manton. It was one he had sent himself.

"That ought to settle it!" he said. "There can't be a doubt now but he's hot after us."

"Well, he won't bother us after to-night," nodded Cool Hand Charley.

"Not much!"

"We'll draw lots to see who shall kill him."

"That lets me in," said Frisco Jim. "I want to take my chances with you. It used to be my delight to snuff out this kind."

Manton had again made an attempt to break his bonds, but he found he could not do so. If his life was spared now, he felt that it would be something little short of marvelous.

Still he was not terror-stricken. Lying on his back, he watched the preparing of the sticks which his enemies were to draw, and he wondered how they would kill him.

All arrangements were made and the lots were drawn. It happened that the shortest fell to Frisco Jim, and so he was the one who should put Manton out of the way.

"I'm glad of it," the heartless desperado declared. "I'll show my style of carving. I am mighty handy at it."

He took out his huge bowie-knife and ran

his thumb along the edge, nodding his head with satisfaction.

"Keen enough," he said. "This same blade punctured Idaho Bob, and he had a record as a carver."

"Go ahead with your job," ordered Cool Hand Charley, brutally. "The quicker it is over the better."

The man from California arose and approached the helpless detective.

How was Manton to escape?

He could think of only one chance for him.

His mesmeric eye!

If he could catch the gaze of Frisco Jim, he might be able to hold the would-be murderer off by means of the single power he possessed.

If that failed him, he was surely doomed.

Frisco Jim came and knelt with one knee on his victim's breast, a fiendish light flashing in his eyes. Somehow, Manton fancied those eyes belonged to a madman.

"Shall I cut his throat, or finish him with a straight lunge?" asked the desperado.

"Just as you choose," calmly replied the Cool Hand.

Frisco Jim lifted the knife.

Just then Manton caught the man's eye, and the helpless detective threw all the power he possessed into that piercing gaze.

The knife remained suspended, while a dazed look crept over the face of the would-be executioner.

The seconds crept slowly past until nearly a minute was gone, and still the knife was held aloft, while Frisco Jim remained crouching on the breast of his captive.

It seemed as if the California crook had been turned to stone.

Cool Hand Charley finally cried:

"Strike—why don't you strike?"

"Those eyes!" gasped Frisco Jim. "Take them away! I can't move!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE.

The Western desperado was held motionless by the power of Old Deadsure's magnetic eyes.

"Cover those eyes and I'll wipe him out!" he panted. "But I can't do a thing now!"

Baltimore Ben and Cool Hand Charley made a move, and Manton knew his chance of handling them all in such a manner was very small.

"Hold on!" exclaimed McGath. "It isn't best to kill him with the knife, after all."

"Why not?"

"The body will show signs that he was murdered."

"We'll bury it in the cellar."

"It's pretty hard to bury something in a city like this so it won't be unearthed. We must finish him some other way."

"How?"

Manton's blood ran cold when he heard them so coolly discussing the dastardly deed they contemplated. McGath and Roberts were certainly two of the most conscienceless criminals he had ever encountered, and Frisco Jim seemed a fit associate for them.

"The machine!" cried Ben. "Have you forgotten the machine?"

"No, but—"

"It's the very thing."

"It may not work in this case."

"There is nothing like trying."

"If we fail—"

"Then it will be time enough to use the knife. If we succeed, not one man in a million will be able to say just how he came to his death."

They called to Frisco Jim to come away, but the California crook declared he could not move, and they were obliged to drag him beyond the reach of the helpless detective's gaze.

Manton wondered to what new device his foes were about to resort in order to put him out of the way.

He was not long kept in doubt.

McGath produced a leather sachet, from which he took a strange-looking square box, from one side of which projected two handles. Manton noticed the crook was very careful not to touch those handles.

Fixed in the opposite side of the box was a key-like arrangement, and this Ben proceeded to turn around and around, as if he were winding a clock.

Suddenly a soft whirring noise began,

coming from the interior of the box. It was so low that Manton could scarcely hear it, but as soon as it began McGath ceased winding.

"There!" he said. "The thing is ready for business for the next ten hours. Hanged if I'm not afraid of the infernal arrangement."

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Frisco Jim.

"Just help Charley turn this miserable detective over on his stomach, so I can get these handles against his hands, and you will soon discover what I am going to do with it."

Immediately Manton was seized by the two men, who took good care not to look into his eyes. Over upon his face he was turned, and he felt that his last minute had come, for he could see no way of escape now.

He wondered what the sensation would be when McGath forced the handles of the machine against his hands, but he did not doubt that the infernal arrangement would end his existence.

At such times a man's brain seems to work with marvelous rapidity. The detective knew he had solved the mystery of Tom Buck's death, if it was Buck whom he found in Madison Square.

The crook had been killed by his two companions, McGath and Roberts, and they had used that very machine to do the work!

That was why the dead man's hands looked as if they had been seared by lightning.

The policeman had declared one of the three men he saw was carrying a small leather sachet.

And the machine was the invention of the deranged man known as Professor Crank. It was his electric apparatus for prolonging life and restoring youth, but, instead of accomplishing the purpose for which it was built, it produced instant death!

Manton was now in such a position that the power of his eyes were useless to him. Bound and gagged, he could not make any resistance or utter a cry.

McGath approached and knelt by the helpless man's side.

Deadsure held his breath. It seemed that he had at last struck a case that was to bring him failure and death.

Suddenly, a wild shriek rung through the room, and a door was burst open with a crash, admitting a figure that leaped madly upon the four men, screaming:

"It is mine! You stole it! Give it to me!"

It was Old Crazy, and he snatched the machine from the hands of McGath, at the same time slashing fiercely at the crook with a keen knife.

Ben dodged the blade, but the sweeping stroke severed the rope that held Old Deadsure's hands secure.

Backward leaped the deranged man, his precious machine clasped to his bosom with one hand.

He struck against the staggering table, and the lamp that stood upon it was knocked to the floor, where it was shattered in fragments, plunging for a moment the place in utter darkness.

Finding his hands thus unexpectedly freed, Manton made the best use of his opportunity by sitting up and tearing the gag from his mouth, after which his fingers worked at the cord that held his feet.

Suddenly, a blaze flared up, for the burning wick of the lamp had ignited the spilled oil.

The light showed Manton the knots about his feet, and it also revealed the knife which Professor Crank had dropped.

Catching up the blade, the detective made a single slash that freed his feet.

None too soon.

Old Crazy had escaped from the room, pursued by the three crooks, but something caused McGath to turn back.

He was just in time to see Manton cut the rope about his feet, and, with a shout, he hurled himself on the detective.

The burning oil was spreading the fire rapidly, and the lives of the two men were in danger. They did not seem to heed this.

Rolling over twice, Old Deadsure was barely in time to avoid Baltimore Ben's first lunge.

A moment later they clinched.

Ben would not have attacked the detective, but he fancied he would have the advantage, as Manton was down.

The ferret had dropped the knife, and McGath seemed unarmed, which seemed to place them on an even footing.

"You sha'n't escape now!" grated the thug.

"Don't be so sure of that," was the reply. "I did think my chances were slim a short time ago, but I feel better about it now."

Ben tried to crush the ferret back to the floor and fasten his fingers on Manton's throat, but the detective was not to be conquered thus easily.

Up rose Manton, lifting his foe by sheer superiority of strength.

"Now, it is a fair fight," he said.

"Help!" shouted Ben. "Charley! Jim! The fly is slipping me!"

"So you are not inclined to be satisfied with a fair fight," observed Manton. "Very well: I believe I am a match for you all."

Higher and higher rose the fire, threatening to grasp them in a few seconds more.

Seeing their danger, Manton grasped Baltimore Ben in an iron clutch and made a plunge for the door which Old Crazy had broken down.

In the very doorway appeared Frisco Jim! Now it was two against one!

"Slug him, pal!" panted McGath. "He's too much for me! Sock him a good one!"

The sang-bag appeared in the hand of the California crook, and he struck at Manton's head.

At that very instant, the detective whirled about in such a manner that Baltimore Ben received the full force of the blow.

McGath was stunned.

Lifting the crook, the fighting detective dashed him against Frisco Jim, causing the desperado to stagger and nearly fall. Manton followed up his advantage, forcing his way into the next room.

There Frisco Jim grappled with him.

The fire was eating its way through the thin partition, and they barely escaped in time from the room where the lamp had been ruined. The entire place quickly became a sea of raging fire.

The detective knew the inmates of the place must be aroused in a few seconds more, and he was in a bad quarter, where the statements of his foes would be taken instead of his own and where a detective was not admired or respected by any one.

Like McGath, Frisco Jim tried to fasten on the throat of the ferret, but Manton took care to baffle him.

Seizing the proper opportunity, Old Deadsure struck his foe a tremendous blow with his clinched fist. Jim was dazed, and Manton broke away, hurling the California crook on top of his senseless pal.

The light of the fire showed him another door, and through this he hastened.

Then he discovered the inmates of the building had been aroused, for there were shrieks of fire on every hand, while a dozen rushing figures brushed against him.

He found some stairs and followed one of these figures to a hallway above, from which he passed to the open air.

He was not destined to get away without one more encounter, for Cool Hand Charley met him as he came out. However, the sudden appearance of the detective gave the crook a start, and he fell back.

"You free?" he cried.

"Quite so," replied Manton. "But you are not. I want you, Roberts."

He grasped the Cool Hand's arm.

"You mean to pull me?"

"Yes"

"Well, you—"

He did not finish. A shrieking woman came plunging out at the open door, run fairly against them, breaking Manton's hold.

Roberts dodged like a flash and sped away into the darkness, Old Deadsure pursuing.

CHAPTER XXII.

OVER THE RIVER.

THE fugitive proved to be fleet of foot, but Manton would have overtaken him had not the Cool Hand known the alleys in that section so well that he was able to dodge and double in a most remarkable manner.

In the end, the crook succeeded in avoid-

ing the detective, and Deadsure was forced to give it up as a bad job.

"I'll pull him in some other time," he muttered. "I have no real proof against him now, but circumstantial evidence would go a long distance toward convicting him. With the aid of that infernal machine, he and McGath killed Tom Buck."

Suddenly, he felt a light touch on his arm. Wheeling instantly, he found himself face to face with Professor Crank, who still hugged the deadly machine to his bosom, the soft whirring sound continuing to come from the interior of the box.

"I know you will not rob me," murmured the strange old man, pathetically. "I do not fear you; but if I go back to my old room, those wretches will follow me there and take my invention from me again."

"Then you shall not go back there," declared the detective, struck by a sudden resolution. "Come with me."

"Where will you take me?"

"To my hotel, where you will be quite safe."

The old man hesitated, but he finally decided to trust Manton.

Straight to the hotel they went, and Professor Crank breathed easier when they were alone in Deadsure's room. The old man sunk into a chair, still hugging his precious invention, which he patted and caressed, talking to it as if it were a thing of life.

"They sha'n't take you from me again," he murmured. "I have you almost completed, and when you are finished you will restore me to health and youth. I will never part with you—never, never, never!"

Manton watched him curiously, feeling a great pity for the unfortunate wretch who had toiled all his life to complete this great machine that should restore his lost youth, but had only succeeded in producing an instrument that caused instant death.

He questioned Old Crazy concerning the date when the machine was stolen from him, and he found it was taken the very night that the dead man had been discovered in Madison Square.

The detective no longer doubted that he had discovered the real cause of Tom Buck's death. Lightning had not harmed him, but the old man's invention had ended his existence instantly.

When Manton attempted to question Old Crazy closely about the invention, the man grew suspicious and evasive, evidently thinking the other might mean to rob him of the secret of his wonderful machine.

The detective pitied the wretched old wreck, for he well knew Professor Crank would never accomplish his object in building a machine that should restore health and youth to human beings. It was the chimerical idea of a disordered brain.

In all ages the men who have sought the secret of perpetual youth have found only death.

Making the old man as comfortable as possible in the room, Manton descended to the office, where the night clerk handed him a letter.

Immediately he felt that it was a communication from Doris Venton, and, on tearing it open, he discovered he was right. She urged him to come to her without delay, no matter what hour of the day or night he received the letter, and she carefully added her address. At the end was an entreaty not to let Frank Howland know where she was.

Although he had formed other plans, Manton did not disregard the summons, but he started off at once for the address given.

Just as Manton came in sight of the house, he saw a cab stop before the door. Two men left the cab, one of whom spoke to the driver, and ascended the steps. The door opened for them, as if they were expected, and they disappeared.

The watching detective was seized with a strange fancy. He believed the men had entered that house for no good purpose, and he instantly decided on a course of action.

Manton walked straight up to the cab, which had halted near a street light. He spoke to the driver, who growled an unintelligible reply.

"Look here," spoke the detective, thrusting back his hat so the light of the street lamp shone full in his face, "I want to borrow this cab."

The man on the street fairly gasped.

"Wh-hat?"

"I want to borrow this cab."

"You're daft! Git a move on!"

"I mean business," declared the ferret, swiftly, not knowing how much time he had to spare before the return of the men who had entered the house. "You will get down and let me take your place."

"The howlin' Dutch I will! Do you take me fer a fool?"

Manton fixed the other's gaze and held him motionless and spellbound. For some moments the two men stared into each other's eyes, and then the detective asked:

"What were your instructions?"

"To wait here for further orders," was the prompt answer.

"Get down."

The driver descended from his seat, not even uttering another word of protest.

"Give me your hat."

The two men exchanged hats.

"I am going to take your place," said Manton. "You will wait for me at the corner of Fourteenth street and Fourth avenue. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"May not show up for several hours, but you are to wait just the same."

The driver nodded.

"If anybody questions you, tell them anything but the truth. Go."

Without a doubt the cabby was completely under the control of Manton's wonderful magnetism, for he walked away, not uttering another word.

Then Old Deadsure took the fellow's place on the cab, pulling the hat well down over his eyes.

"I wonder what will come of this," he thought. "If I am wrong in my calculations, it is a clear waste of time—"

He stopped suddenly.

The door of the house opened and three figures came down the steps. Two of them were men, and there was a muffled figure between them—a woman's figure!

The men were supporting this muffled figure—almost carrying her.

In an instant Manton became convinced he had appeared just in time to get track of some deviltry. He sat up very straight, not appearing to pay the slightest attention to the two men and their charge.

The cab door was opened, and, with a few low-spoken words, the muffled figure was bundled in, both men entering also.

For a moment Manton was nonplussed.

What was he to do? He had received no instructions.

His anxiety was quickly relieved, for one of the men seemed to bethink himself. He got out of the cab and spoke to the detective in a low tone.

"How often does the Greenpoint ferry run at this time of night?"

"From Tenth or Twenty-third street?" asked Manton, in a disguised voice.

"From either."

"From Twenty-third street, not more than once in forty-five minutes, and not as often as that from Tenth street."

The man uttered a smothered exclamation of anger.

"Take us to Twenty-third street," he said. "If we can't get over right away by the Greenpoint boat, we'll cross to Broadway, Brooklyn. Get it?"

"Sure."

"All right."

The man re-entered the cab, and Manton started up.

"I wonder who you are?" was his mental question. "You're not Fielding, that is sure, yet I am confident Fielding is at the bottom of this affair. The girl has been drugged, and they are running her into Brooklyn. There are two of them to one of me, but I am going to take them over. If they get the best of me, they are swift."

When the ferry-house at Twenty-third street was reached, the Greenpoint boat was found waiting, only two or three sleepy passengers on her, and not a single carriage or team of any kind. Inquiry revealed the fact that she would start within ten minutes.

They drove on.

The late moon had risen, and seemed to be hanging above the Brooklyn roofs, casting a silvery flood of light on the rippling bosom

of the river, and showing the skeleton spars and lines of the craft which lined the shore.

The boat finally swung out and went lumbering lazily across, cutting through the green water, and leaving a boiling wake of foam behind.

Greenpoint reached, Manton was told to drive to a certain street and number. Fortunately, he knew the locality, and was able to take them there.

When he had halted in front of the number designated, the two men got out, one going up the steps and ringing, while the other remained by the cab.

A sudden thought struck Manton.

A moment later his horses were dashing along the street, urged onward by cutting strokes from his whip, and the plotters were left behind, without doubt two extremely astonished men.

Deadsure looked back and saw them pursuing him some distance, and calling to him, but he never paid the slightest heed. They were soon distanced.

In the old days Manton had known the proprietor of a "quiet little house" near Broadway Ferry, and thither he drove, finding, to his satisfaction, the man still kept the house.

The girl was removed from the cab, and the lights of the hotel parlor revealed a surprising thing to the detective.

She was not Doris Venton!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DETECTIVE DISGUSTED

Not Doris!

Old Deadsure was astounded.

But he knew her.

She was Fancy Flo!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Manton. "Have I been taking so much trouble on her account?"

At first he was disgusted, but on giving the matter a second thought, he fancied he might not have wasted his time after all.

The adventuress seemed unconscious, and it was plain she was under the influence of a powerful drug. Her face was pale and haggard and she breathed heavily.

"There is something about this affair I do not quite understand," thought Manton. "How did it happen this woman was in the very house where I expected to find Doris Venton?"

He was certain he smelled liquor on the woman's breath, yet he did not believe she had swallowed enough of the wretched stuff to be thus overcome. If not, then it must be she was drugged by some one who had an object in rendering her unconscious and helpless.

The detective believed Fancy Flo could give him evidence that would be valuable, and he resolved, now she was in his hands, to keep her where he could produce her at any moment.

A short talk with the landlord resulted in an agreement that was satisfactory, for the man knew Deadsure well and trusted to his judgment and discretion.

Suddenly the girl began muttering something, and they listened intently.

"I will blow!" came thickly from her lips. "Don't think you can stop me! The only way to shut me up is to fork over a big roll."

A look of satisfaction flitted across Manton's face, for he instantly believed he understood why she was drugged.

"I'm dead leery on the game," the girl went on. "That detective has all the points, and we're liable to be pinched any minute."

Old Deadsure saw she had been frightened. That was a very good reason why she was "dead leery" on the game.

"So you won't put up? A hundred—bah! I want five hundred! I may call again in a week. Five hundred don't go a great distance in New York."

She paused and choked a little, then seemed to be struggling desperately for some moments.

"Let go!" she gasped. "Don't—choke! I'll go to—her! She—shall—know! I'll tell the truth!"

Manton nodded his head; he was satisfied that he understood the whole matter now. Having drank more wine than was good for her, Flo had threatened her accomplices and then she hastened to Doris for the purpose of giving the game away. They had followed,

and what happened was not difficult to surmise.

Suddenly Fancy Flo started up and glared around.

"Poison!" she cried, wildly. "I am poisoned! Help! They have killed me!"

She fell back, beating the air with her hands.

"There may be something in this," said Old Deadsure, quickly. "Call in a doctor, Kimball. Be lively!"

The landlord hastened into the office and aroused a sleeping boy, who was hustled off after a physician. The man of medicine lived close by, and he was soon on hand, having dressed hurriedly, being told it was a case of poisoning.

He knew what was best to do, and took Flo vigorously in hand. Manton waited half an hour, and then was informed the girl had been drugged, but she had not swallowed a deadly lotion.

Kimball promised to take care of her and see that she did not leave the house, and Manton drove the cab to the nearest ferry, arriving there just in time to catch a boat for New York.

In re-crossing the river Manton was not alone, by any means. He found himself in the midst of milk-wagons, meat carts and heavy trucks of various kinds.

It was near morning, and the laboring world was getting astir.

The gray light of dawn was creeping over the city roofs when he reached Fourteenth street and Fourth avenue, where he found the cabman patiently waiting for him.

"I am much obliged for the use of this vehicle," smiled the detective.

"That don't settle the bill!" growled the man, who was fuming with anger. "I don't understand this business, anyway!" I'd like to know how it was I made a chump of myself by gettin' down and lettin' you take my place?"

"You were very accommodating."

"Commerdatin' be—blowed! I didn't do it 'cause I wanted to, but 'cause I *had* to. You told me to come here and stay, and I *had* to do that. It gets me!"

"Well, see how this strikes you." Manton thrust a ten-dollar bill into the man's hand.

"It hits me right where I live," was the instant reply. "This hain't a bad night for me. T'other fellers tipped me a tenner."

"This is to keep your mouth closed."

"Just what t'other ones said."

The driver's anger was appeased, and Manton left him in a very satisfied frame of mind.

Knowing delays were dangerous, the detective hastened directly to the house from which Fancy Flo had been taken, hoping to find Doris there and have a talk with her.

He was obliged to yank at the bell for a long time before any one appeared at the door, and then a sleepy-eyed mulatto girl showed up and asked what he wanted.

"Is Miss Doris Venton here?"

"She has gone away."

"When?"

"About two hours ago."

The detective looked searchingly into the face of the domestic to make sure she was telling the truth, and he saw she seemed honest enough.

"You are sure she has gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did she happen to leave?"

"A young gentleman took her away."

"What kind of a looking gentleman?"

The girl described Walt Fielding.

"Did she leave any word for me?" asked the detective.

"She did give me a note, sir, for a gentleman by the name of Burke."

"That is my name."

"But the young man took it."

"Oh, he did!"

"Yes, sir."

"How did that happen?"

"He said she had decided not to leave it."

Old Deadsure's teeth came together with a click.

"Has any other woman left the house tonight?"

The girl had begun to grow suspicious, and she suddenly asked:

"Why should I tell you so much?"

Manton showed his shield.

"I am a detective."

She gave a little gasp and seemed frightened.

"Kindly tell me if any other woman has left the house to-night."

"Yes; but she did not belong here."

"How did she happen to be here?"

"She came to see Miss Venton."

"Did she see her?"

"No."

"How was that?"

"The young man wouldn't let her."

"How did this woman appear?"

"She had been drinking."

Manton knew it was Fancy Flo.

"Did she create a disturbance?"

"She threatened to, but—" The girl hesitated.

"But what?"

"The young man admitted a friend who succeeded in quieting her."

"Were the three alone together?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the parlor."

"Do you know if they drank anything?"

"I do not."

"How about their going away?"

"One of the young men went out and brought a cab around. Another man came with him. By this time the woman was in a pretty bad state. They helped her down to the cab and then drove off."

"And the young man who kept her from seeing Miss Venton remained behind?"

"Yes, sir."

"For how long?"

"Only a short time. He went up and talked with Miss Venton a while, and then he went out and brought around another cab. They soon went away."

"How did Miss Venton happen to come here?"

"The young man brought her."

"What kind of a house is this?"

"A private boarding-house."

"For ladies?"

"Mostly; though some gentlemen stop here."

"I suppose this young man was familiar with the place?"

"I can't say. I have only been here two weeks. I never saw him before last night."

"Do you know where these people went?"

"No, sir."

"Does any one in the house know?"

"No, sir. They were very careful to keep that point secret."

Manton asked a few more questions, and then he turned away. He was not fully satisfied Doris and Fielding had left the place, but he was forced to confess the girl had seemed honest enough in her statements.

He resolved to return to his hotel for the time, taking up the matter a few hours later. Once more Doris Venton had flitted, and he felt thoroughly disgusted. The girl's erratic movements were taking up altogether too much of his valuable time.

"If I didn't want to give Fielding enough noose to entangle himself in, I'd arrest him on some charge and keep him where he'd let the girl alone for a day or two," muttered Manton.

When he entered the hotel he caught a glimpse of a man who quickly stepped behind a pillar, and he knew Jack Cable was on the watch there.

"I wonder what in the name of the wonderful that fellow can be hanging around here for," he thought, pretending he had not noticed Cable. "He doesn't seem to be doing much of anything but watch me."

He took the elevator and ascended to his room. When he unlocked the door and entered another surprise awaited him.

Old Crazy was gone.

In vain Manton looked around for the old man. The mad professor had vanished, taking his wonderful invention with him.

The window of the room was open, and a fire-escape ran close by it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FRANK AND OLD DEADSURE.

THAT explained how the old man had departed.

Still Manton wondered how he had summoned sufficient courage to venture upon the iron ladder and descend to the ground.

The detective was not a little disgusted by this fresh disappearance, for he had fancied the old man's machine might prove of

value in showing how Tom Buck came to his death.

"This case is enough for the whole police force of the city to manage, let alone one man!" he growled, locking his door behind him. "As fast as I pin down one corner another breaks loose."

However, he did not worry much over the course affairs were taking. Instead of that, making sure the window was secured, as well as the door, he threw himself on the bed and closed his eyes, having decided to sleep exactly an hour.

Within five minutes of the time he had set for awakening the detective opened his eyes and sat up. He immediately arose, pushed the button to the electric call bell and ordered his breakfast brought to the room when the boy appeared.

Then he washed, removing all traces of his late disguise.

His breakfast was soon served, and he ate heartily. When he had seen the empty dishes removed, he set about disguising himself once more.

In a little more than half an hour, what seemed to be a full-blooded Irishman left the room, locking the door behind him.

"The 'son of the old sod' held a short black clay pipe in his mouth and seemed like a laborer who had a day off and was going out to see the sights, having rigged himself in his best clothes, which were shabby enough.

The elevator boy did not know him.

"Look here, Mike," cried the youth, aggressively, "how'd you happen to stray in here?"

"Pwhat's thot to th' loikes av yez, Oi dunno?" was Manton's instant retort.

"You don't belong around here."

"Now don't you be afther tellin' Moike Mulloy where he belongs, yez raskil! Oi know me business."

"I'll have to report you to the boss. We don't allow such freaks strolling about loose in this hotel."

Finding they were near the bottom, Manton gave the boy a wink, saying:

"Mum's the word, Nick. I'm Number 63."

The lad nearly fainted.

"You do beat all creation!" he gasped.

The detective slipped a quarter into his hand and stepped from the cage-like box.

He came face to face with Jack Cable, and with deliberate intent he ran into the police spy, nearly upsetting the latter.

"Look here, you blundering bog-trotter!" snapped the regular, giving Manton a thrust; "don't you know better than to run against a gentleman when you see him?"

"Faith, Oi do," was the reply. "But Oi don't be afther seein' any gintlemen."

Cable was greatly enraged at this.

"I'll arrest you!" he threatened.

"Oi wish ye would give me a rest," retorted Manton, his dark eyes twinkling.

Cable fumed.

"I'll not disgrace myself by pulling such a freak!" he exclaimed. "But I'll make a complaint to the proprietor of the hotel."

"He niver takes any notice av loafers, onless it's to droive them out av the howtil."

The police detective so far forgot himself that he clinched his fists and made a threatening gesture. Deadsure locked him steadily in the eye, not seeming in the least alarmed.

"Stroike," he said. "Oi wonder if Oi'll notice it at all, at all."

But Cable repressed his anger, thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away. With a smile of contempt on his face, Manton watched him a moment, and then he left the hotel.

As he turned the corner into the next street, he espied a familiar figure lurking in a doorway.

It was Frank Howland.

Deadsure immediately approached the young man, saying:

"W'u'd yez moind givvin' a poor divvil a loight. Me poipe hiv gone out?"

Frank felt in his pockets and produced a match.

"Tharnk yez," nodded Manton. "Ye'r' a foine illigent young gint, thot's what ye are. It's me own son Oi don't moind sayin' ye resemble. He's a Yankee, though it's meself is a full-blooded son av the Auld Dart. He do be afther puttin' on soom airs an' schmokin'."

av thim nasty things what they carl shiggerettes. He's a foine b'y, though he has forgot how his own fayther looks, so he don't know the loikes av me whin he mates me on the strate. Oh, Oi don't moind that, fer he's all drissed up so foine wid a crase in his breeches an' a floower in his buttonhole. Oi hiv worruked all me loife, an' Oi nivver had so menny foine clothes as he has widout worruk'in' at all. He can make a bigger spread wid a doime thin Oi can wid a dollar."

"There are plenty of fellows like him in the city," smiled Frank, keeping his eyes on the hotel.

"But you don't moind tarkin' to me roight on the strate here," said the detective, as if filled with wonder.

"Not a bit," laughed Frank.

"What be yez afther watchin' that howtil fer?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Divvil a bit do I swally that. Perhaps it's Auld Deadsure yez warnts ter see?"

Frank started.

"What do you know about Old Deadsure?" he asked.

"Oi know a great d'ale, me b'y. He's th' biggest raskil that ivver walked on two legs, God rist his sowl!"

"Go on!" commanded the young man. "I do not care to talk with you longer."

"Arrah! It's getthin' shtuck up all at once ye be. A bit ago yez didn't moind sp'akin' wid me, and now—"

"You are taking too much of my time."

"Yer toime don't be afther seemin' so vallybul, young mon."

"Go on!"

"Nivver a bit do Oi go till Oi rade yez a lesson in politeness, me lard. Take off yez coat."

Frank protested he did not mean to fight.

"What if Oi do, and yez hiv to?" asked Manton, who was enjoying the situation.

"I shall call a policeman."

"There's not wan in soight."

"Then I'll have to knock the stuffing out of you!" was Frank's angry declaration. "I can do it in about a minute, and I don't need to take my coat off!"

Old Deadsure found the youth was actually coming for him, and he broke into a soft laugh, saying:

"Steady, Howland. Put down your fists."

Frank was astounded.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Don't you know me?"

"Why—why it can't be—Old Deadsure!"

"Oh, yes it can! You have hit it, my boy."

Frank whistled.

"You do take the cake for disguises!" he asserted. "I saw you when you went into the hotel, but I did not dream for one instant that the Irishman I saw come out was the man I was watching for."

"Then you were looking for me?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you come right up and ask for me? or why didn't you stop me when I went in?"

"I didn't stop you because you were almost into the hotel before I saw you, and I didn't come up and ask for you because I did not fancy falling into Jack Cable's hands. He is there."

Manton nodded.

"I saw him. Let's move on from here. He might spy you by accident." They walked on together. "Now tell me what you want to see me for."

"Doris has been kidnapped again by Walt Fielding."

"I know it."

"Do you know where she was taken?"

"No."

"I do."

"Good!"

"It was a pure case of chance. I was over on West Thirteenth street this morning, after being on the search all night for a friend who knows all about me. I saw a cab pull up before a house, and two persons got out. They were a man and a girl. The man conducted her up some steps. Just as they were about to enter a door, I heard him speak, and I recognized Fielding's voice. At that instant, she turned to run down the steps, as if suddenly resolved on getting away. Before I could make a move, he caught her up in his arms and entered the

house, the door opening for him. I heard a smothered cry as the door closed, and I knew the girl was Doris."

Frank paused, but Manton urged him to go on.

"My first impulse," continued Frank, "was to rush up the steps and try to force my way into the house. But I quickly realized that I would fail to gain admittance, and that would ruin everything, so I struck out to find you. That is all."

"You can lead the way directly to this house?"

"I can."

"Lead on."

CHAPTER XXV.

IN AN OPIUM JOINT.

DEADSURE cautioned his companion to point out the house from a distance, as they might be seen if they came up in front of it.

"What do you intend to do?" asked the young man, anxiously. "Call the police and raid the place?"

"Not exactly," replied Manton. "That is a last resort, my boy. I shall attempt to find out what kind of a ranch it is. If it has a respectable name, then I will attempt to get in without creating suspicion."

"How can you do that?"

"I don't know just now; but I will find a way."

At length, Frank halted and pointed out the house. Manton told him to remain where he was until he returned, and then the detective sauntered slowly along the street, puffing at the black pipe.

He was gone more than half an hour, but when he came back he declared:

"Got the points. It's a dope joint."

"A what?"

"Dope joint."

"What's that?"

"Opium den."

Frank was horrified.

"And they have taken Doris in there!" he gasped. "Great Heaven! What shall we do—have the hole pulled at once?"

"I don't think that is the best course," replied Manton.

"What do you suggest?"

The young man was trembling with anxiety and distress, mingled with unbounded rage.

"I have learned the place is run like a private house," returned the detective. "The domestic in the kitchen is Irish, and she is visited almost every night by a young fellow named Pat. I am going to attempt to work my way in by the back basement-door."

"What will you do after you get in there?"

"Try to find the girl and get her out. This is not the time of day for a great number of patrons to be there, and I shall take my chances on tackling a bigger job than I can handle."

"What am I to do?"

"Keep watch of the house from the front and see that Doris is not taken away."

"That all?"

"That is all."

A few moments later Manton made his way around to the back of the block, carefully counting the houses until he knew he had reached the number he sought. He had secured a coil of rope, and, as there was a row of flats on the opposite street, he walked the top of the fence dividing the back yards, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Loine up? Put up a loine? Hiv a loine?"

The clothes-lines from the flats ran from the kitchen windows to tall poles in the back yards, and the detective knew it was customary for some men to go around putting up the lines on these poles, for which they were paid from twenty-five to fifty cents each line.

"Loine up?" he bellowed, balancing on the fence and pretending to look around at the windows for the person who needed his services. "Hiv a loine?"

At that moment he seemed to drop his coil of rope into the back yard of the house he wished to visit, and he stopped to mutter something and shake his fist at the offending coil. Then he dropped after it.

Deadsure had noticed there was a gate in the fence, but he also noticed it was closed

and secured with a padlock. Picking up the rope, he tried the gate, but discovered, as he had expected, it was fast.

After looking around at the high fence, as if seeking a way to get over, Manton approached the door. He had seen a female watching him from one of the windows, and he was not surprised when the door opened before he had touched it.

A rather comely appearing Irish girl stood before him.

"What can the loikes av yez be afther wantin' here?" she asked.

Manton instantly lifted his hat, bowing low.

"Av yez pl'aze," he replied, "Oi foind mesilf unable to git out av th' yarrd."

"Whativver did yez git in fer?"

"Oi dropped me rope, miss, and hid ter come afther it; but nivver a bit do Oi meint that now Oi hiv sane yer own purty face. It's paid a hundred toimes over Oi am fer any throuble Oi may hiv taken."

She blushed a bit and shook her head.

"It's a flattening tongue yez hiv in yer head. You hid betther kape them things to soay to yer own woife, Oi believe."

"Faith, Oi would thot, but I hiv no woife. Oi lift a purthy garris back on th' ould sod and she said she'd wait fer me. Oi was to sind her money to come over whin Oi hid earned enough. Oi sint it. She didn't come. She married another feller, and they set up house on me money, bad 'cess to thim!"

The girl laughed, showing her milk-white teeth.

"It's played fer a chump ye was," she said.

"Thot's what Oi think," sadly nodded the detective. "All th' soame, Oi'm glad me oies was opened before Oi merrid th' loikes av her."

The girl glanced about.

"Oi mustn't stand here jabbering," she asserted.

"Let me out av th' yarrd, darlint," smiled Manton. "Though Oi don't be in no hurry to go so long as Oi can be wid th' loikes av ye."

"Oi hiv not the key to th' gate."

"Bad 'cess! You'll hiv to let me through th' house."

She hesitated, a doubtful look on her face.

"Me masther—"

"Will nivver know a blissid thing about it."

"Av he did, Oi'd git me walkin' papers."

"Don't fear, darlint. Oi'm to be thrusted. Oi loike th' look av them swate oies and thot purty chin. Bliss me saoul! Av Oi wasn't such an auld b'aste and ye didn't hiv a felly, Oi'd be afther comin' round on th' sly and seein' yez sometomes. Oi hiv another poile laid away in th' bank, an' Oi moight set up housekapin'—only Oi carrn't foint a girrl that will hiv a looking auld od-damahoon loike me."

The girl protested he was giving her "blarney," but he succeeded in getting into the house after a while. Once in the kitchen, he was in no hurry to be let out by the front door. He managed to draw the girl into conversation and interest her so she forgot to hurry him out, much to his satisfaction. She allowed him to sit down while she set about some cooking to which it was necessary for her to attend.

Manton knew he must find a way to explore the house without arousing the girl's distrust, and he wondered how such a thing was to be accomplished. It was far easier getting into the house, he thought, than to get away from her.

However, he told stories and kept her in a good humor by plentiful flattery. At the same time, he was gradually getting some points about the place. The girl declared her name was Kitty, and she said she did not like working there very well.

"Th' mistress do be afther hiving so many callers," she said. "And they all hit the poipe. She told me she'd skin me av Oi ivver blowed, but Oi'd break th' oie av her if she troied to lay a finger on me. Oi don't think much av thim as takes to th' poipe. It's a haythen thrick."

The detective found she knew very little about the people who frequented the house. However, he was able to pick up a few points.

Suddenly an electric bell in the room rung

sharply, and the girl was instantly in a flutter.

"Oi dunno what th' mistress can be afther wantin' av me now," she said excitedly. "They'll foind Oi hiv you in here, an' that'll m'ane a row."

She washed her hands swiftly as she was speaking.

"Where do ye go to answer this call?" asked Manton.

"Up to th' mistress's room, though Oi dunno why she didn't call her maid. Oi suppose it's something about breakfast she wants to say."

"You go up an' Oi'll slip out th' front way whoile ye're gone."

She did not object to this, being flustered and excited. A moment after she left the room Manton followed, finding himself in a hall, from which he ascended some carpeted stairs and reached the main floor of the house. There he paused a moment, undecided about the best course to pursue. Fancying he heard some person approaching, he turned the knob of a door and quickly stepped into the room, closing the door behind him.

There was but one window to the room, and that was high up and closely curtained. A tiny gas-jet was burning, but it was so low the room was in shadow mostly.

Manton did not glance around, but paused at the door, where he listened intently.

He heard a strange, smothered breathing, and then the sound of a faint laugh, followed by a groan, smote on his ears.

Those sounds were in the very room where he stood!

He wheeled and glanced about.

On the heavily-carpeted floor were several dark figures, and the smell of "dope" was now almost sickening. The figures scarcely seemed human at first, but he quickly decided they were. They were stretched in various attitudes, and the dim light of the gas-jet revealed their pallid, ghastly faces. They had long ago ceased smoking the deadly drug, but they were still full under its influence, while pipes and little urns were strewn about on the floor.

The detective stood quite still, a feeling of repulsion surging over him, for he knew he was in the presence of human beings who had lowered themselves beneath the level of beasts.

He turned up the light a bit. As he did so, a haggard face uprose before him, and a pair of glaring eyes looked into his own!

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAPPED.

OLD Dead Sure was startled, half-expecting an attack, and he prepared himself for the assault.

The wild eyes glared at him in a blood-chilling manner, while a meaningless laugh rattled from the lips of the man on the floor, who muttered some incoherent words.

Suddenly, seeming to realize his situation, the man murmured something about having a whiff, and then he lay down again.

Manton saw there was nothing to be feared from him.

There were five sleepers on the floor, and the light of the gas-jet, which was reflected through a blue globe, gave their countenances an uncanny look, like the faces of so many dead creatures, while their hands seemed bony and skeleton-like. Some were breathing heavily and regularly, while the breathing of others seemed strangely faint and fitful. Some were muttering and grinning in their sleep, while others moaned aloud, as if in terror.

For a little time Manton stood there, fascinated by the weird spectacle. He was aware these men and women, for two of them were women, might seem no different beneath the light of day than hundreds he met on the streets, but their appearance now was little short of frightful.

He grew sick from inhaling the odor of "dope," and he felt like rushing from the room as quickly as he could. This, however, he knew would not be a safe thing to do, and he turned to the door once more, where he listened attentively.

For fifteen or twenty minutes he stood thus, but he heard no sound save the closing of a door in some distant part of the house. He did not know whether the Irish girl had returned to the kitchen or not, but he finally resolved to venture from the room into which

he had strayed, for the place seemed to him like a charnel-house.

Softly opening the door, he stepped forth into the hall again, breathing easier when he was beyond that room of degradation. He did not pause there, but immediately commenced lightly ascending the stairs.

The detective fully understood the great risk he was running, for, not being a regular ly appointed officer, he could be arrested on a serious charge if discovered in the house—and captured.

But Manton did not intend to be captured, if he was unlucky enough to be discovered.

Up the stairs he lightly ran. Just as the top of the flight was reached he heard a door open somewhere above and a voice call out something, after which the door was closed.

He felt that some person was coming down.

Immediately he looked around for a place of concealment, and, close at hand, he saw a door standing slightly ajar. Pushing this open, he quickly entered, closing it behind him, the catch giving a peculiar click as he did so.

The room was not very light, as the shades were closely drawn, but he indistinctly saw several pieces of furniture, one being an arrangement he knew was a folding-bed, while a sofa stood across one corner of the room. There was also a small table and some chairs, with a dressing-case in a shadowy corner. A carpet was on the floor.

Old Deadsure listened at the door, and his keen ears heard some one pass down the carpeted stairs.

When he could no longer hear any sound, he felt for the knob of the door.

To his astonishment, he could not find any!

Crossing the room, he ran up one of the shades, which gave him enough light to examine his surroundings. Then he turned back to find the door.

A great surprise awaited him, for he could discover no door in any part of the room. The entire walls were of panels, and each panel looked like its neighbor, except that some were scarred.

He knew the door was near one corner of the room, and there he searched faithfully, but the panels seemed well matched, and no trace of the door was to be discovered.

He now remembered the peculiar click he had heard when the door closed behind him, and he realized that it had fastened with a spring lock.

And there was no way of getting at that lock from the interior of the room!

He was a prisoner!

Manton was inclined to laugh at first, and then he grew angry at himself, for he knew the situation might prove disastrous for him. He had deliberately walked into a trap of no person's setting!

He turned back to the windows.

"I will be able to attract attention from them," he muttered; "but it may not prove a healthy thing for me to do so. I do not fancy it at all."

Going to the window, he found one of them was double, at least, and he wondered why that was so. The inside shutters had closed back on either side of the window, and he examined them, discovering to his surprise they were iron.

Then he examined other things about the place, and he soon decided the room was intended as a sort of prison apartment. The iron shutters could be closed and locked securely, so any one confined there could not reach the windows. These being double, any cries would not be liable to be heard on the street.

"This is a fine arrangement!" commented the trapper detective. "I must say I admire this! What am I going to do?"

He sat down on the corner sofa and thought it all over, and the more he contemplated it, the greater grew his disgust.

All at once, he sprung up and approached the window, thinking he might be able to see Frank Howland and attract his attention. He did not look for Frank, however, for his attention was attracted to two men who left the sidewalk and came up the steps to the house.

He drew back and listened, hearing the outer door close. As he was standing quite still, his ears detected the sound of some one fumbling at the door he knew must open into the room where he was confined.

Manton's eyes roved swiftly about the place for a chance to conceal himself. The sofa across the corner seemed inviting, and the next instant he was behind it, lying curled in a knot in the narrow space.

"Come on," he thought. "I don't believe you'll see me here."

He heard the door open and close, and he felt sure the two men had entered the room, although neither spoke for a few seconds.

"Hello!" said a voice, after a bit. "How does it happen that shade is up. My orders are that it is to be kept down. Some one has been in here and run it up. I don't like that, for I won't have the servants prowling about this room."

"Sit down, Charley."

"Don't mind if I do," said another voice. Manton recognized the voice of the second speaker.

It was Cool Hand Charley!

The first was evidently the proprietor of the house.

"This is interesting," thought the concealed detective. "I may tumble to something, after all. Perhaps my luck is not so bad as it might be."

The Cool Hand had seated himself at the little table, and the other man went around and sat down on the opposite side. He was a slender fellow with a pale face and a coal-black mustache. His eyes were rather restless, and he seemed rather uneasy, as if something troubled him. He was well-dressed—almost too well-dressed, if such a thing is possible.

"I have been out all night," he declared, after a few seconds.

"Biz?" inquired the Cool Hand.

"Yes; though I don't mind admitting we made a big balk of it. Had Shank with me."

"What was the lay?"

"Nothing much."

The Cool Hand showed his teeth in an icy smile.

"Oh, you needn't say if you don't want to. Perhaps you are afraid of me?"

"No, no, no!"

The man of the black mustache hastened to assure his companion he was not in the least afraid of him.

"Well, we have been in the business long enough to know each other pretty well," observed Charley.

"That is true. This was only pulling a girl over into Brooklyn and putting her where she would not trouble the cove I brought you here to see."

"Who was the girl?"

"Fancy Flo."

The Cool Hand whistled.

"What has Flo been up to?" he asked.

"Threatening to peach."

"Really?"

"For a fact."

"It's not like her. She's dead gone."

"She thought she had a pull, and she was inclined to crowd the team."

"So you shut her up?"

"Made the attempt."

"You didn't fail?"

"It looks that way from the road."

"How did it happen?"

"The cabman got away with her. And we had coughed up a tenner, too!"

"Did you have a man you knew?"

"I thought so. He has done more than one turn for me, and he always kept mum."

"Who is he?"

"Hunk Davis."

"Why, he's all right!" cried Charley.

"So I thought."

"What did he do?"

"Well, you see we took the girl over to Greenpoint. I knew a place there where she would be kept all right. We had got a drug into her, and she didn't know enough to make a fuss, so it was easy handling her. We reached the place where we were going, and Shank got out. I followed. Then that howling Hunk Davis whipped up his horses and went skootin' away, leaving us in the lurch. Where he took the girl I don't know."

"Did you try to follow?"

"Did we! Well, I should say so!"

"Hunk must have known it was Flo you had. That's it! That's it! He has done many a turn for her, and he's all broke up over the girl."

The man of the black mustache drew a deep breath.

"That explains it then," he said.

"Sure!"

"Now, we will have to look sharp for Flo."

"You can bet on that. She is a holy terror when she gets started, and she has lots of friends. Some of her friends have money, too."

"The man she is bucking against has money. I brought them together. He wanted a good sharp girl who would play a little game for him, and I recommended Flo. He says she played the trick out of sight; but she filled up and wanted to bleed my friend too much. Then she got leery and swore she would blow anyway. Something had to be done."

"Is this friend the one you have brought me to see?"

"Yes."

"He has a job for me?"

"If you will tackle it."

"Then it is a tough one?"

"Rather."

"Will he cough up well?"

"I think so. He is lining my clothes with currency. He wanted a good man, and I thought of you. He does not wish to deal directly with toughs, and you can do the job or act as middleman."

"Then there is blood about the job?"

"Yes."

"None of that for me. I have one job on my hands, and when that is disposed of, I am going to live an honest life the rest of my days. I am tired of being hounded. I would pull out now, but it can't be done."

At this moment there was a peculiar knock on the door.

The man of the black mustache instantly arose.

"That is the man you are to see," he declared, as he made his way to the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLD DEADSURE LISTENS.

CONCEALED behind the sofa, Old Deadsure had heard every word. He now knew Cool Hand and McGath had had no dealings with Fielding. Previously, he had fancied it possible the two gentlemen thugs were simply the hired tools of the scheming young scoundrel.

Manton was beginning to feel tired and cramped, but he kept perfectly quiet, knowing he might attract attention if he made a move. Still, he wondered how long he could remain curled up thus without stretching himself in some way.

It was plain there was some method of opening the hidden door from the interior of the room, for the proprietor of the unctuous house did so with ease. The detective resolved to discover how this was accomplished, if possible, for he did not fancy being left a prisoner again in that dismal place.

The door opened and Walt Fielding strode in, his face dark and lowering.

"Well, have you boxed up that she-cat, Westlock?" he asked.

"Sit down and I will tell you about it," was the evasive reply. "This is Charley Roberts—Roberts, Mr. Fielding."

"Aw! Who the bloomin' blazes is Roberts?" inquired Walt, surveying the Cool Hand.

"The fellow I was telling you about."

"Oh, I know."

"Yes. He's all right. Sit down."

The trio all sat beside the table.

"I have had bad luck," confessed Westlock, speaking hastily, as if resolved to get the matter over with at once.

"Bad luck?" exclaimed Fielding. "How?"

"The girl—"

"Bless me eyes! She didn't—"

"No; but the cabman did. He ran off with her."

Fielding smote the table with his clinched fist.

"Who ever saw such bloomin' luck!" he cried. "I supposed she was safe out of the way, don't yaw know. She'll be coming down on me again!"

Then he asked how it came about, and Westlock told him the particulars. When Fielding had heard the whole story, he sprung up and paced the room, snarling and raving like a man beside himself.

"Everything goes wrong!" he cried. "And it's all on account of that infernal de-

tective, don't yaw know! If he hadn't frightened the girl by following her she might not have kicked up the bobby! By Jawve! He must be put out of the way—really he must!"

He little dreamed how near him lay the very man about whom he was fuming.

Manton was listening intently.

"You are right on that point, Fielding," agreed Westlock, pulling at his black mustache. "If you can get him out of your way, you will be all right; and here is the very man to aid you," nodding toward Cool Hand Charley.

"Excuse me!" objected the crook, promptly. "I have one detective on my hands now, and he is quite enough for yours truly. If this is the kind of a job you have laid out for me, I'm not in it. I haven't any idea of getting mixed up with any more of their class; they are dangerous."

Fielding paused facing Cool Hand.

"There's money in it, don't yaw know," he said.

Charley shook his head.

"That don't count."

Walt looked more angry and disgusted than ever.

"All right," he snapped. "If I cawn't find some one who will tackle this Old Deadsure, by Jawve! I'll do him myself, though such work is new to me. I have—"

The Cool Hand was on his feet.

"What's that you say!" he cried. "Old Deadsure—Manton Burke?"

"That's who."

"He's my meat!"

Fielding caught eagerly at this.

"You mean—what?"

"That I'll take the job."

"Good! By Jawve! I hawve some luck aftaw all! It means five hundred dollars in your pocket, my man."

Charley scowled a bit.

"Don't 'my man' me," warned the crook. "I don't take to that kind of rot! I am free to say I have a little grudge against this detective, and that's why I am ready to lay him cold. Are you ready to put up in advance?"

"You fellaws are great to bleed a man," protested Fielding. "I'll put up five hundred in advance."

"A hundred in advance," demanded the Cool Hand.

"Well, not a cent moaw."

The plotting rascal forked over the money.

"Manton Burke is as good as dead," said Charley.

Behind the sofa, Manton Burke chuckled to himself:

"This is a great joke!"

Westlock got up and went to the door, where he called a servant to whom he gave an order. The door was left standing wide open when the man rejoined his companions, and the servant soon returned with a tray, on which were bottles and glasses. These were placed on the table, and the servant retired, Westlock closing the door behind him.

"We'll seal the bargain with a cold bottle," said the master of the house. "I hope this will come out all right."

"I hope it will come out better than the girl business, don't yaw know," nodded Fielding. "She was a dawndy to play her pawt, but she spoiled it all by the wretched row she cut up aftaw."

"Still, your cousin is none the wiser, you say."

"Not a bit. I was able to keep the creature from getting to Doris and filling her eaws with the stuff."

"How is she acting?"

"Doris?"

"Yes."

"Oh, she cuts up blooming rusty."

"We may have to tuck her into this room. This is the room I told you about."

"Aw!" And Fielding looked around. "Don't look much like a pwison, don't yaw know?"

"Where is the door?"

"Well, that's a bloody odd thing!" Walt confessed, after he had looked for the door in vain. "I don't see it at all."

Westlock arose and went to the window.

"Look here," he said, "these are iron shutters. They can be closed and locked so not a ray of light will come in from the outside. The cries of a person confined here

can only be faintly heard in the hall, and they cannot be heard at all on the street."

"Why, this is a regular prison!"

"Something of that kind," confessed Westlock, returning to the table.

"What do you use it faw?"

"Well, some of the smokers cut up rusty occasionally, and we have to put them in here till they get their senses back. See?"

The wine was opened and the glasses filled.

Manton listened to this talk and heard the clink of glasses. Every bone in his body was beginning to ache, and he wondered if he could hold out much longer. He longed for the rascally trio to leave him, although he wondered how he was going to get out after they were gone.

"You didn't have this room built for yourself, Doc?" asked Cool Hand Charley.

Westlock shook his head.

"It was just as you see it when I moved in," he replied. "That was one reason why I took this place. I knew the room would be mighty handy, for a person that hits the pipe is pretty sure to get the tantrums sooner or later, and sometimes they play the deuce with a house. The only way to keep 'em still is to lock 'em up."

"And this is the room faw my cousin?" inquired Walt, looking around with interest. "Well, we may hawve to chuck her in heaw. She still refuses to marry me, but she'll hawve to come round. I'm bound to hawve her, don't yaw know."

"That's right," asserted Westlock. "Stick to it. She seems quiet enough now."

"She's waiting faw that blooming detective, don't yaw know," laughed Fielding. "She don't know I got her away so he wouldn't find her, and she don't know I took away the note she left faw him."

After ten minutes more of desultory conversation, the men finished the last of the wine and arose to leave the room.

"Look here," said Westlock. "I'll show you how this door opens on the inside."

Old Deadsure ventured to sit, being determined to discover the secret of the door. Lifting his head above the back of the sofa, he watched Westlock, who continued:

"See the knot here in this panel? Well, you only have to press your thumb on it—so—and presto! open comes the door."

The detective saw how it was done, and he was quite satisfied when the hidden door closed behind the last of the trio and he was again alone in the prison chamber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FIELDING SHOWS HIS HAND.

MANTON made haste to get from behind the sofa and stretched his cramped limbs.

"Things are moving very well," he softly observed. "I wonder if I can find that magic knot by which the door is opened?"

He immediately made an examination. Several knots had been skillfully painted in the panel, but he finally touched the right one, and the door started open with a click that told it was worked by electricity.

"So far so good," thought the detective, as he peered out and glanced up and down the winding stairs. "I wonder what I had better do next."

Seeing no one at hand, he ventured forth. He now knew Doris was confined in that wretched house, but even she was not aware she was a captive. He scarcely thought it best to go away until he had found her. His only fear was that Frank, waiting outside, would grow impatient and do something rash.

Old Deadsure was well armed and ready to make a stiff fight, if necessary, but he hoped to get away without an encounter with his enemies.

As he was hesitating on the stairs, he fancied he detected some one approaching from below, and he slipped back as silently as possible into the prison chamber, carefully closing the door behind him.

Something seemed to warn him of approaching danger, and he once more sought concealment in the dark corner behind the sofa.

It was well Manton did this, for Westlock soon entered the chamber, taking away the tray, to which he had restored the bottles and glasses.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the rascal, as he

paused a moment to glance about. "This Fielding is a slick cove and thinks he's playing a great game. Well, we will assist him, but he'll pay dearly for all the aid he gets."

Then he went out again, closing the door.

Old Deadsure once more arose from behind the sofa, on which he sat down to consider the best course to pursue. If he could get a chance to speak a few words with Doris, he felt he would be able to convince her of Fielding's duplicity. She did not fully trust her cousin, yet she had been led to think it possible Walt was more honorable than the man she still loved, for a black charge had been made against young Howland.

The detective resolved to make an attempt to find the room where the girl was confined, and that before he left the house. He had risen for the purpose of again venturing forth when he once more heard a hand fumbling at the door. He barely had time to ensconce himself behind the sofa for the third time when the door opened and two persons entered.

They were Walt Fielding and Doris.

The door swung to and closed with a click that caused the girl to start and look around.

"What was that?" she exclaimed. "Why have you brought me here? I demand to be taken from the house."

She was dressed for the street.

Fielding grinned triumphantly and threw himself into a chair.

"I know you did, my cousin," he said, serenely; "but I brought you heaw, don't yaw know."

"For what reason, sir?"

"Aw! I wanted to hawve a little tawk, you see."

She tossed her head angrily, her eyes flashing.

"I have no desire to make further conversation with you, as I informed you a few moments ago. Your proposition was insulting in the extreme, and I am now aware you are anything but the man you try to seem! You will find I am not as helpless as you fancy!"

"Come down off your high hawse," drawled Walt, coolly producing a cigar case and lighting a cigar. "I am the best friend you hawve left in the world, Dorry."

"Heaven pity me then!" she cried.

He laughed brutally and twirled the cigar in his fingers, while she paced the floor trying to repress her excitement and nervousness. He seemed to feel that she was quite in his power, and he gloated over her in a way.

"Come," she finally said, pausing before him, "I want to go out."

"I hope you are not in a hurry, dear cousin."

"Come, Walt, do be manly enough to befriend me this time! Why should you persecute me now when I have so much to bear?"

The cry came from her heart, and it should have touched him.

"You are quite mistaken, Dorry—you really are," he protested. "I am not persecuting you, don't yaw know. I am simply keeping you from that rascally fellow who calls himself a detective, but who is your worst enemy. That he is the friend of Frank Howland is really quite enough to show what kind of a man he is."

"You are too kind, Walt! If you would let me alone, I think I would be able to take care of myself. You lured me into this house by lies, and now you mean to keep me here. Oh, man! man! have you no honor? You must remember the mystery of my poor father's strange disappearance is not cleared up. You ought to aid me to investigate this terrible affair."

At this Fielding laughed again.

"Aid you! Why, my deaw Dorry! what can you do? The police are doing all that is necessary."

"I demand to be released from this room!"

"Walk right out."

"Where is the door?"

"Well, well! Really, wheaw is the bloom-ing door?"

Fielding pretended to be astounded.

"You have entrapped me!" cried the girl.

"We are in the trap together."

She shrank from him, a sudden fear coming over her.

"Walt," she entreated, "for the love of Heaven, let me out!"

"For love of you, I'll keep you in, don't yaw know," he nodded. "Dorry, I do love you, and I want to marry you."

"Don't speak of that again!"

"Oh, but I shall! That is why I brought you heaw. We can speak of it without being disturbed. If you will marry me, everything will be all right—really it will."

She turned on him instantly.

"What do you mean by that?" cried Doris. "Do you mean that if I will marry you my father will return to his home?"

"No, no."

"Then how can everything be all right? You are cowardly to speak to me of this when my heart is full of grief! Would it not look well for me to marry now!"

"You can give me your pledge."

"I can, but—"

"Will you?"

"No—a thousand times no! I have told you that repeatedly! I do not love you, and I do not believe in cousins marrying."

"What if I told you I am not your cousin?"

"I would not believe it. I know your tricks too well. You would resort to anything to overcome my prejudice. Oh, Walt! is it my inheritance you are after? If it is that, I will divide with you, providing father is really dead. I will do anything if you will cease annoying me!"

He pretended to be offended.

"My dear Dorry, you do me a great injustice—you really do! It is youawself I want—nothing moaw. You are beautiful and sweet, and I love you!"

"You are making me hate and loathe you!"

"You think to turn me that way, but I care so much for you I can stand anything from youaw lips, don't yaw know."

He arose and attempted to approach her, but she retreated swiftly, placing the table between them.

"Don't you dare touch me!" came hoarsely from her lips, her eyes flashing. "If you do, you shall regret it! You snatched a kiss in the room above, but I'll not endure another indignity at your hands! If you attempt anything of the kind, you shall not find me entirely helpless!"

He looked at her in admiration.

"By Jawve!" he drawled. "You are a perfect queen!"

To this she did not reply, but stood there regarding him as bravely as she could. After some moments, he went on:

"It's useless for you to act this way, Dorry. I hawve the best of it, you see. You cawn't get out of this room."

She glanced toward the windows.

"That's all right," said Walt, understanding the look.

He walked over and closed the iron shutters, suddenly throwing the room into deepest darkness.

A hush followed, and then steps were heard crossing the carpet.

Old Deadsure began to think his time of action had come, and he partially arose from his place of concealment, expecting to hear the sound of a struggle between the designing villain and the insnared girl.

Instead of that, he heard Doris cry:

"Don't you dare touch me, Walt Fielding! I have a dagger that I carry in my hair! It is in my hand, and I will give you the length of it if you put a hand on me!"

The reply was a short laugh, and then Fielding struck a match, by the light of which he groped his way to the wall, where his finger pressed a white button.

Immediately several small glass globes about the room glowed with the white light of electricity.

The light showed Doris standing on her guard, her back against the wall, to which she had retreated, a small silver dagger glistening in her hand.

The detective lowered his head again and listened, finding his aid was not immediately required.

"You are a bold little piece," declared Walt, as he admired the girl's pose; "but you are obstinate as a mule, don't yaw know."

There was a look of mingled fear and contempt on her charming face.

"Do you know what kind of a house you are in?" the rascal finally asked. "Well, I won't tell you outright, Dorry, but you can surmise. If it were known you stopped here you would find yourself disgraced. If you will come to my terms, I'll get you out quick enough, but otherwise here you stay. You will disappear as mysteriously as did your father. I am bound to conquer in the end, and the sooner you come to terms the better for you. I am going to leave you alone, and let you think it over. By-by for a little while."

He retreated to the corner, where he could covertly touch the knob that worked the door, and a moment later he passed out. The door closed behind him, and Doris thought herself alone in the prison chamber.

She little thought Old Deadsure was close at hand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MANTON AND DORIS.

FOR some moments after Fielding's departure Doris still stood with her back against the wall, looking like one dazed. She finally staggered to a chair and dropped down, her strength deserting her.

"Oh, Heaven!" she moaned. "What have I done that such misfortune should fall upon me! I know now that my cousin is a black-hearted scoundrel! I am in his power! What can I do?"

She lifted the tiny dagger and looked at it.

"Here is my only defense," she sobbed. "If the worst comes, I can turn it against myself! I will do that rather than become more to Walt Fielding than I am at this minute!"

Manton sat up and looked at her. She did not see him. He wondered if Fielding was waiting outside the hidden door or had really left for a time. How was he to attract the girl's attention without alarming her so she would shriek aloud?

Having thought it all over, he sunk down behind the sofa again. He knew if she were to turn suddenly and see him, she would not recognize him in that disguise, and she would be pretty sure to shriek aloud with terror.

Lying close behind the sofa, he softly called.

"Miss Venton."

Silence followed.

"Miss Venton."

Evidently she was astounded, not to say frightened, at hearing her name thus called, for she made no response, and he was obliged to speak the third time.

"Who calls?" she asked.

"A friend."

"Who are you?"

"Manton Burke, the detective."

"Where are you?"

"In this room. Do not be frightened and cry out."

Then he sat up, and she saw his face arise from behind the sofa.

Despite his words of caution, she came near uttering a cry when she saw him.

"You are not Manton Burke," she declared.

"Oh, yes, I am," he promptly retorted. "I knew you would not recognize me. I am in disguise—playing Irishman, you see."

She was quite astounded, but her fear quickly passed, for she saw he was no Irishman, although he looked like one. He arose and came from behind the sofa, standing before her.

"I can scarcely believe you are Manton Burke, the detective," she declared, in wonder. "You do not look the least like that gentleman."

"The change is one of the tricks of the trade, Miss Venton."

When her wonder had passed in a measure she asked him how he came to be there, and he explained as briefly and clearly as possible.

"Then you heard all that passed between my cousin and myself?" asked Doris.

He bowed.

"I did that, and much more that passed before you entered this room. Lying behind that sofa, I heard a bargain for my life made between three men, your rascally cousin being one of them. He fears me and wants to put me out of the way."

"And I have grown to fear him so much! He is a very wicked young man!"

"I agree with you perfectly, else he would have never have insinuated you here."

"Oh, this horrible house!" she moaned, wringing her hands. "Did you hear what he said about it?"

"I did, and I assure you he tried to give you a false impression. The house is bad enough, that is true, but it is not what he would have you infer. It is an opium joint and a resort of rascals, but nothing different."

She was so much relieved by this information that she uttered a sobbing prayer of thankfulness.

"He was a brute to tell you such a thing," asserted Manton; "and my fingers itch to get hold of him. But for you, I should have come forth and attacked him. I could have taken care of myself with the whelps who are to be found here, but I might not have been able to get away and take you with me."

"Is there any hope of escaping?"

"Most certainly. If you will trust everything to me, it will come out right in the end. This cousin of yours has played a bold game—altogether too bold to be shrewd. He is daring enough, but it takes the cunning of a fox to make a successful criminal."

Doris urged him to get her out of the place at once, but he fell to talking to her in order to soothe her nerves, and he soon had her quiet.

"Can't you see how much time I am losing by having to skip here and there after you?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Very well," Manton went on; "if I give him a chance, this cousin of yours will sack you again, and I shall have to hunt you up. I am not getting a chance to trace your father. Now, I am tired of this, and I am going to put an end to it. One way to do so is to swear out a warrant against him and have him arrested."

Doris was not pleased with this plan, for she fancied it would bring disgrace upon her, as she might have to tell of all the adventures that had befallen her, and she did not wish to acknowledge she had been her cousin's prisoner in a Thirteenth street opium joint.

"Is there no other way?" she asked.

"It is to bring evidence of his dastardly conduct so plainly before him that he will be frightened into giving over his game and taking himself off. I would be much better pleased to see him punished as he deserves."

But the latter plan pleased Doris, and, as he was now satisfied Fielding really had nothing to do with the disappearance of the Buffalo druggist, Manton was willing to let her have her way in the matter. He had set about solving the mystery of Roscoe Venton's vanishing, and he felt that Fielding's cupidity and admiration for his beautiful cousin, although great, had not been sufficient to cause him to plot the destruction of his mother's own brother. He did not for a moment take any stock in the rascal's statement that he was not really Doris's cousin, believing, as did the girl, that was a trick of the schemer to overcome her prejudice against a marriage of blood relations.

"What evidence can you bring that will cause him to quail?" she asked.

"The woman he hired to lie to you about Frank Howland."

"The one who claimed to be Frank's wife?"

"Yes."

"Then she did not speak the truth?"

"Did you really believe her?" questioned the detective, a trifle reproachfully.

The girl looked ashamed.

"Why, it all seemed so natural and so pitiful that I fancied there might be truth in it. Even if he were not legally married to her—if he had promised to make her his wife, or had given out that she was such, I made up my mind to have nothing more to do with him."

"That was well enough; but I give you my word the woman was hired by your cousin to play a part and make you believe Frank false and treacherous."

"Do you know this?"

"Did I not hear it all talked over while I lay behind that sofa? And then, I obtained very nearly a confession from her lips, hav-

ing followed her into a woman's pool-room, where she was blowing in the money she had been paid for the job."

A great look of relief came into the girl's eyes.

"I am so glad!" she murmured. "I did not want to believe such a terrible thing about Frank, but—but—well, that woman did seem so honest and so in earnest!"

"She is a very good actress, and she has nerve, even though she did get leery when she knew I was close on her trail."

"Where is she now?"

"Safe in Brooklyn, beyond the reach of your scheming cousin."

Then he briefly told her of the previous night's adventures and how he had exchanged places with the cabman, thinking Doris was to be kidnapped, discovering his mistake only when he looked on her face at Kimball's hotel.

She listened to all this in wonder.

"And the woman came to tell me the truth?" she questioned.

"That's what she did," affirmed Manton.

"You think my cousin may be frightened away if he is confronted by her?"

"Yes, if she still sticks to her resolution to blow the game."

Still, the detective would much rather have brought Fielding to account, which he repeatedly declared, saying it did not seem right for the rascal to go scot free.

"If you do not press the case against him," he observed, "I may take a fancy to crowd him for entering into a conspiracy against my life and hiring assassins to cut me down. I can do that, and make him sweat."

But little time had been spent in this conversation, and neither of them had rested at ease, for they knew not at what moment the hidden door might open to admit a foe. Now Manton came to the part of his plan most difficult to speak about, and he hesitated. She was quick to discern anything of the kind, and she urged him to go on.

"You are a brave girl," he said. "I saw that by the way you handled yourself before Fielding. Now, I shall be obliged, if I carry out my plan, to ask you to do something that will test your courage to the limit."

He paused, and she urged him to speak out, her face growing a trifle pale.

"In order that Fielding may not take the alarm, I want you to remain here in this room a few hours, while I bring my guns to bear on the place."

She uttered a little cry and dropped into a chair.

"Oh, I cannot!"

"You would have been forced to do so had I not appeared."

"Is it necessary?"

"It is the best thing to be done. He will not suspect the blow is coming till it falls, and that will make it all the more effective. I am sure you can take care of yourself for so short a time. Can you handle a revolver?"

"Yes; but I have none."

"Take this one of mine," and he placed the weapon in her hand. "If you are bold, you can hold the fort against your cousin and his friends. Don't let them intimidate you with threats or deceive you with promises. If they attempt to get in here, drive them out at the point of the revolver. They will not be in a great hurry when they find how you are armed, and I will come back to you as soon as possible. I will bring Frank."

That promise lighted her fair face, and, after a little thought and doubt, she agreed to his plan.

They spoke but few words more, and then, having charged her again to keep up a stout heart, Manton touched the magic knot, and the hidden door opened before him.

He stepped forth, hoping to leave the house without being seen.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD DEADSURE ARRESTED!

FORTUNE certainly favored the daring detective, for he walked calmly down the stairs and left the house by the front door, no person appearing to scrutinize or question him.

Still watching the house from a distance, Frank Howland was amazed to see the disguised detective come deliberately out, de-

scend the steps, at the bottom of which he paused to clap his black pipe in his mouth and light it with a match.

Manton did not glance at the young man as he calmly sauntered past, but Frank knew he was seen, and he followed not far behind. When they had left that locality far behind, the detective turned and motioned for Frank to come up.

"You take the cake!" the young man exclaimed. "How in the world did you—"

"Never mind how I did it," interrupted Manton. "You see I did, and that is enough."

"What did you find?"

"Your sweetheart."

Frank reddened a trifle.

"Then you are sure she is there?"

"I had a talk with her."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"An opium den."

The young man fell back with an exclamation of horror.

"And she is still there! She must be—"

"Don't get so excited on the street," cautioned Manton. "You will attract attention."

"But, heavens, man! think of Doris being in such a place!"

"I have thought of it."

"Why didn't you try to get her out?"

"Because I chose to let her remain."

Frank did not understand him, and Manton added:

"I left her one of my revolvers, so she can defend herself. She is in no immediate danger, and we will be back there before another night comes around."

"Another night!" gasped the younger. "Why so much delay?"

"I have the best of reasons."

"But I have not! I shall arouse the police and have the place pulled without—"

"You will do nothing of the kind," came sternly from the detective's lips. "Do you think I shall let you make a botch of everything? How much time do you suppose would elapse before the house would be pulled after you made a complaint? You do not know. Well, quite time enough for every vestige of evidence against the house to disappear. Not a pipe or a bit of dope would be found, and there would not be a patron in the place. Your charge would fall to the ground, for it would seem that the house was respectable."

Frank closed his lips firmly and said nothing, for he did not know anything to say, being well aware that Old Deadsure was thoroughly conversant with the doings of the police.

"Now," added the Madison Square Detective, "allow me to get a word to Superintendent Byrnes and he will detail me enough men to do the work without questioning just where the house is located. Thus, if the proprietor of the place has a friend among the police, no warning will be given. I think this is plain enough for you to understand, and if it is not, I shall not waste my breath in further talk."

Frank felt the rebuke, and he hastened to apologize; but Manton cut him short, saying:

"Follow."

They were soon on Fourteenth street, where they boarded a car bound for Twenty-third street Ferry. Being dropped at the ferry, they took a boat for Broadway, Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn a surprise awaited Manton, for Fancy Flo had slipped from the charge of the people in whose care he left her.

"She was clean out of her head for a spell," explained Kimball. "And then she grew crafty. I think she is deranged, but she was keen enough to trick us and get away."

Manton's face was dark.

"Here it is again!" he said. "I am sick of this. Every time I get a person where I want him—or her, as the case may be—he or she slips away. How did it happen?"

"She fooled my wife, whom I left to watch her," declared Kimball. "She pretended she was asleep, and my wife left her for a moment. When Mrs. K. returned the girl was gone."

"We shall have to go back without her," declared Manton.

He paid Kimball well for his trouble, and they hastened to the ferry again.

"What will you do?" asked Frank. Manton did not reply, for his plans were not perfected, by any means. He felt, however, he would be obliged to take Doris from her present situation of danger, and he knew he could easily have Fielding arrested on some charge that would hamper the young rascal for a time, at least.

The detective little thought he was shadowed, and neither he nor Frank saw the skulking figure that kept track of them and hurried onto the boat close behind their backs.

The signal was given to go ahead, the chains cast off, and the boat moved out into the swiftly-running current.

Manton and Frank moved to the forward end, where they stood conversing in a low tone. The ferret did not seem to be looking about him at all, but his appearance was deceptive, for he suddenly said, speaking beneath his breath:

"Hello! You have a foe on the boat."

Frank started a bit, but a word of warning from Manton kept him from looking around and thus betraying himself.

"A foe?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Cable, the police spy."

"He is following us?"

"Sure."

"Then why doesn't he attempt to arrest me?"

"He will before the boat runs in at the Grand street slip."

They had taken the ferry to Grand street, instead of returning to Twenty-third street.

"What is to be done?" asked Frank, after a few moments of silence. "Shall I let the fool arrest me and cause me trouble?"

"Not just now. I have use for you."

"How am I to slip him?"

"I don't know yet. If he tries to arrest you, I will make a bluff at him."

It will be remembered Manton was still in his Irish rig, and he now produced the short pipe once more, filled it from a sack of fine-cut and lighted it. Then, as if quite by accident, he strolled over to where Cable was standing with his hat pulled low over his eyes. Stopping by the side of the police spy, Manton coolly puffed the smoke into his face.

Cable moved away a few steps.

Manton followed.

"It do be a mighty foine day," he observed, taking great care to blow the smoke into the face of the officer he so heartily disliked.

Cable grunted and moved again.

"It do be a mighty foine day."

Manton had followed him up and was calmly blowing volumes of smoke into his face.

"Go fall on yourself!" retorted the police spy, as he retreated once more.

The man with the pipe stared and blinked in what seemed a stupid manner, and then he said:

"Oid do thot same av Oi looked loike you."

Appearing affronted, he clinched his fists and followed Cable up, the pipe clinched between his teeth and his chin thrust forward.

"Av Oi ivver see a gintlemon again it'll not be by lookin' at you," he said, still forcing Cable to retreat. "It's a civil tongue you nade in your head, me mon."

This was more than Cable could endure. With a sweeping blow, the police officer knocked the bowl of the pipe to the deck, leaving the stem still in Manton's teeth.

"You should know better than to blow your vile smoke in a man's face!" he cried.

"Be th' howly S'int Patherick!" roared Deadsure, seeming on the point of charging the other. "Oill knock the two oies av yez inther wan! It's me poipe what Oi've hid this siven lang year! Och, hone! Oill nivver see the loikes av it!"

In another instant he had Cable by the collar.

"A fight!" shouted the teamsters, and there was a sudden rush toward that point.

But Cable suddenly recognized his foe.

"Burke!" he cried. "I know them eyes!" Then he twisted himself from the grasp of the other and sprung away.

The boat was close into the slip, it being but a short run across to Grand street, and

Frank Howland was waiting close by the gate, ready to get ashore the moment it was possible.

Cable's eyes quickly discovered the young man, and he forced his way through the crowd. In a moment he had his hand on Frank's shoulder.

"I want you," he said. "I will—"

Just what he would do he never stated, for Frank whirled on him, caught him up, and flung him headlong toward the center of the boat.

Then came a bump.

The boat had touched.

Cable was up in an instant, and coming at Frank again, determined he should not escape.

With the agility of a cat, the young man went over the iron gate. Barely avoiding the clutch of one of the angry gatemen, he leaped ashore and sped up the slip.

Manton was at Cable's side, and he clapped the police spy on the shoulder, chuckling:

"Thot b'y do be roight shlippery, Oi think."

Cable wheeled and grappled with Old Deadsure.

"I arrest you for aiding him to escape!" he shouted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FANCY FLO MAKES ANOTHER BLUFF.

DEADSURE laughed in the face of the ex-cited police spy.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Cable!" he advised. "You know well enough you cannot make such a charge stick against me. I have a pull, and you will only put yourself to trouble for nothing."

"I am going to take you in, just the same," was the dogged retort. "I'll make a complaint against you. I am sick of your meddling!"

"That is great," returned Manton. "You have done nothing but dog me about ever since you took hold of this Venton case. You have not made a bit of progress on it."

"I have made as much progress as you."

"I doubt that, for I do know more about it than I did when I began. That's not the point. If you should take me in, you would become the laughing stock of the entire force. Remember I was a regular once, and I am in good favor with Byrnes now."

"You may not be in as good favor as you think."

"And you will take me in?"

"Yes."

"No you won't!"

Manton's dark eyes gazed steadily into the wavering orbs of the police spy, and Cable suddenly felt their fascinating power. He tried to look away, but found he could not stir. Without speaking a word, Deadsure willed that Cable should release him and leave him the moment the gate was opened.

The boat had been made secure by this time and the gates were suddenly opened. The hand of the police spy dropped from Manton's shoulder, and he walked away.

The spectators of this strange scene wondered, but New Yorkers are not given to asking foolish questions, so not a word was spoken to Manton as he followed Cable.

Deadsure laughed to himself when he thought how easily he had disposed of his troublesome enemy.

As for Cable, he did not once pause or look back, and he soon disappeared from view, seeming in a great hurry.

Manton looked around for Frank, but the young man was not to be seen.

"He will turn up all right," thought the detective, as he started for Police Headquarters.

He had not gone far when he suddenly espied a woman who was wandering along in an aimless fashion, looking about her in a strange, dazed manner.

An exclamation broke from his lips.

It was Fancy Flo!

A moment later he accosted the adventuress.

Flo started back in alarm and seemed on the point of running away.

"Don't be frightened," said Manton, quietly. "I won't harm you."

She did not speak at once, and he saw there was a strange look in her eyes. Something told him she was not exactly right in her mind.

"Who are you?" she faltered.

"I am Manton Burke, the detective." She seemed dazed and doubtful, and he explained he was in disguise. It took a long time, however, for her to understand, and then she asked:

"Are you going to pull me?"

"I think not."

"What do you want?"

"I want to have a talk with you."

"I haved no time for talk. I must find the sneak who duped me! I know I was drugged! I don't feel just right in my head now, and I don't know where I am. The city seems changed."

"You had better come with me."

"I won't be pinched!"

"But I have told you I am not going to pinch you. Can't you take my word?"

"You bluffers lie so!"

"I am giving it to you straight. I want a talk with you. Where shall we go?"

"I am going to him."

"Perhaps I can help you find him. Is it Fielding or Westlock you want?"

"Westlock — he's the one! Fielding couldn't have fooled Fancy Flo! He got me to drink something to clear my head. I knew I had been taking too much champagne. He lied to me! The moment I drank the stuff I was muddled, and I have been muddled ever since."

They talked a few moments, and she finally confessed she was hungry. Manton did not find it very difficult to induce her to enter a restaurant, but he was satisfied she was watching all the time for an opportunity to slip away.

They sat down at a little square table, one on either side, where they could look directly into each other's faces. The detective asked her what she wanted, telling her she could have anything the place afforded, except wine.

"I'm not going to blow you off to wine, Flo," he said. "You have taken too much of that already."

At this she laughed harshly, and then she choked back a sob. He saw the tears come into her eyes.

"Wine has been my curse," she declared. "The stuff brought me where I am. I was a good girl once, and there was no reason why I should ever turn to the bad, but wine did it."

He saw she was in the mood to tell her story, but he had heard it many a time, for all of her class tell the same old tale, with slight variations. He had no thought of listening to it again, and he made haste to switch her off on another tack.

Manton was hungry, and he ordered for both, consulting his companion's desires.

"Now we can have a comfortable little lunch, Flo," he said, seeking to revive her spirits and make her feel free. "I am hungry enough, for I have not eaten since the last time—and that was not this day."

In order to divert her mind for a time, he fell to joking and talking of various things, and she was soon in better humor, for she smiled and looked more like herself, even though a dazed light would come into her eyes now and then.

After a while, he got to speaking of Frank Howland.

"Your claim that he is your husband has broken him all up. But for me, he would have sworn out a warrant for your arrest."

Her features suddenly hardened.

"Let him!" she exclaimed. "He would wish he hadn't before he was done!"

"Now you are talking foolishly, Flo," calmly declared the detective. "What could you do? You have a bad rep, and it would not be so very hard to convince a judge you had resorted to blackmail."

"That may be; but I would drag his name in the mud."

"What has he ever done that you hold a grudge against him?"

"I have no grudge, if he will let me alone."

"You ask a great deal of a man you have placed in such a false position."

"How have I placed him in a false position?"

"You know well enough, my girl. He is not married to you."

"Perhaps that is not my fault."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Maybe he ought to be."

Manton shook his head.

"You can't fill me with that," he declared. "You seem to forget I followed you into 'The' Allen's pool room and talked with you when you were inclined to speak pretty freely. You were loaded with wealth, and you said you obtained it by playing a little game. You even said enough so I could not misunderstand what that game was."

"Now, Flo, you must see how foolish it is to stick to that old story. It won't go down, and it's bound to get you into a heap of trouble. You started in to blow the whole thing last night, and so you may as well make a clean breast of it now. I am the best person you can tell it to, for I will know what ought to be done."

"Are you afraid? Is that the matter? Do you think I will get the truth and then pull you in for it? I am ready to give you a pledge on that point."

"I know all about you fly cops. Your pledges don't amount to smoke."

"I am not going to threaten you, Flo; but, I'll tell you now that the square way is the best way. You are not into this thing so far but you have a chance to pull out easy."

She seemed to be thinking for some moments, and he watched her closely. At length, she said:

"All right; I'll make a clean breast."

He nodded with satisfaction.

"Good!"

"But you must give me your hand that you won't crowd me for it."

Manton held his hand across the table, and she placed her ungloved fingers in his palm. Those fingers were white, tapering and plump. He could not help thinking how different this woman seemed than most of her class.

"I did lie when I said we were married," she confessed.

"Who hired you to tell that story?"

"This Walt Fielding."

"How did you happen to meet Fielding?"

"Westlock brought us together."

"What is Westlock to you?"

"Nothing much. He has given me some dinners and taken me to theaters."

"He is married? His wife helps him to run their Thirteenth street joint."

"So you know about that! Well, she isn't his wife any more than I am. They are in partnership. He put up the money to start the ranch on and took her in to make the thing look respectable."

"Well, Westlock doesn't count. Still, I'd like to know how he came to select you for the job?"

"Why, I was the right one."

"How is that?"

"He knew I had a grip on Frank Howland."

"What kind of a grip?"

For an instant there was a sly twinkle in Fancy Flo's eyes.

"What do you suppose Howland visits the city so often for?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you heard me accuse him of coming to see a woman, and you did not hear him deny it. He couldn't, for it was true."

"And that woman?"

"Was me, of course. Westlock knew it, and so he called me up. I don't pretend to have a claim on Howland, for he never agreed to marry me, but he did come to see me."

A look of anger settled on Manton Burke's face.

"Woman," he sternly said, "you are trying to deceive me with another lie; but the trick will not pass!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRISCO JIM SHOOTS.

He looked straight into her eyes, and she suddenly lost the power to take her gaze away. He had resolved to force the truth from her lips, for he did not believe what she had told him.

For some moments they both sat like graven images, staring hard at each other across the little table.

All at once, Old Deadsure fell back in his chair, a faint smile parting his lips.

He had conquered; Fancy Flo was his to command.

She sat staring straight ahead, a sleepy, far-away look in her eyes.

"Now," said the detective, firmly, "you must tell me the truth, for you cannot lie,

no matter how much you may wish to do so."

She did not speak.

"Answer my questions," commanded Manton. "First, did you ever see Frank Howland before you charged him with being your husband?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Once."

"When?"

"The day before."

"How did it happen?"

"Westlock pointed him out to me."

"Then Howland never came to New York to visit you?"

"Never."

"How did you happen to claim he came to visit a woman?"

"Westlock told me so."

"Did he tell you who the woman is?"

"No."

"Nor where she lives?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On Thirteenth street."

"East or West?"

"West."

"What number?"

Flo gave the number.

"Why!" exclaimed Manton; "that is nearly opposite Westlock's place!"

"Yes."

Deadsure mused a moment. It was not difficult now to understand how Westlock happened to know so much about Frank Howland. But who could this mysterious woman be?

Of a sudden, he resolved to exert the full extent of his power on the woman before him. It was something he seldom did, as it was very trying to his nerves and not a little dangerous should he practice on a person abnormally weak.

It happened at that hour that they were the only customers in the little restaurant. The cashier was nodding behind his wicker, and the lone waiter was far from attentive.

Leaning across the table, Manton lightly but firmly touched both Fancy Flo's hands in a particular manner, at the same time seeming to look deep down into her sleep-burdened eyes. The lids drooped, and the adventuress was in a trance.

"Now," said he, "to begin with, I want you to tell me where Frank Howland is at this minute."

After slight hesitation, Flo named the number on Thirteenth street where she had said he visited the unknown woman.

"What is he doing?" asked Manton.

"Speaking with a lady."

"Young or old?"

"About thirty."

"How does she look?"

"Very neat and tidy."

"Are they alone?"

"No; there is another person in the room."

"Man or woman?"

"A woman—very old—white hair."

"What is she doing?"

"Sitting in an easy-chair counting her fingers."

At this moment some other customers entered the restaurant, and Manton leaned across the table, touching Flo lightly on the forehead, saying:

"Wake up."

In a moment the adventuress's eyes opened, and she said.

"Why—why—did I fall asleep? I seem to have been dreaming."

But when he asked her what she had dreamed she could not remember.

They finished their lunch, and then he said:

"I want you to come with me."

She was alarmed.

"But you said you would not pinch me!"

"I am not going to, Flo. I want a little of your assistance. You have told me the truth, and now I want you to go before Doris Venton and say the same things. But, first of all, we will call for Frank Howland."

"Call where?"

She had not the slightest idea of where they would look for the young man.

Leaving the restaurant they took a car to Broadway, and there they changed for one bound up-town, getting off at Thirteenth street. Together they proceeded westward.

till they came to the house Flo had mentioned in her trance. Up the steps went Manton, compelling his companion to follow. The bell was rung, and it was soon answered by a servant. The detective called for Frank Howland, forcing his way into the house.

The young man was there. From a room near by he stepped forth, having heard Deadsure's voice. He was astounded when he saw Fancy Flo, but Manton only said:

"I have come to see the woman you visit here."

Frank fell back.

"What right have you—" he began, but he checked his hot words.

"Show her to me, Howland," said Manton, sternly.

"All right," was the reply. "Step this way."

The detective advanced to the door of the room.

"There she is," said Frank, and he pointed to a white-haired old lady who sat mumbbling and grinning in a chair, paying little heed to any one around her.

Manton was not a little taken aback, but he calmly asked:

"Who is she?"

Frank replied:

"My mother!"

He moved back from the door, and Manton followed, feeling himself an intruder.

"I will explain," said Frank, speaking hastily, as if the task were unpleasant and he wished it quickly over. "She has lost her reason. I am well aware there is nothing disgraceful about that, but she was always a very proud woman, and the thought of becoming a babbling idiot nearly drove her to self-destruction, for she was aware of her failing condition long before the last spark of reason left her. We were well off and lived in a small country place, but she made me sell everything and move into New York, where we could bury ourselves from the friends who had known her in other days. My father, you will understand, was dead. Shortly after we came to New York, becoming aware that she was failing rapidly, my mother exacted a promise from me, making me swear on her treasured Bible that I would keep it sacred. She made me promise never to place her in any institution, but at the same time, I was not to keep her with me. I was to find some good people with whom she could live and be cared for if they were liberally paid. I was to take care she had every comfort she needed and was in no way misused, and I promised to visit her at least once a month. With all this, she also made me swear I would let none of my friends know the exact truth, for it seemed to her a disgrace that her boy should have an idiot mother. That is all."

"And I beg your pardon for forcing you to reveal the unpleasant truth," said Manton, seeing how much Frank was troubled.

But words were incapable of easing the strain of the situation, and the detective said no more. He was turning away when Frank's hand touched his arm.

"Where are you going? Is it to that house where you found Doris? You will understand now how it happened I was on Thirteenth street at such an hour of the night. I will go with you now."

As they were passing out, the young woman whom Flo had described in her trance appeared and bade Frank good-day.

Just as they reached the street two drunken men came along. They were Baltimore Ben and Frisco Jim. Ben lurched heavily against Frank, at the same moment recognizing Fancy Flo.

"Hello!" he cried, thickly. "Got another bird in the snare—eh, old girl?"

Flo fell back, her face turning crimson, for even she was not used to being addressed in that manner. Ben pressed forward and attempted to embrace her.

"Don't play high with me!" he sneered. "I know you, though you never did have much regard for me."

He grasped the woman rudely, and she cried for help. Like a flash, Frank Howland's fist shot out, and the drunken crook went down on the sidewalk.

"Served him right," nodded Manton.

The sound of that voice seemed to arouse Ben, and he quickly sat up, all his intoxication seeming to vanish instantly.

"That is no Irishman!" he shouted. "It is Old Deadsure, the detective!"

Frisco Jim snatched out a revolver.

"Then here's to Old Deadsure!" cried the California crook.

Manton dodged just as the revolver spoke.

Uttering a cry of pain, Frank Howland reeled and fell!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOUND AT LAST.

ALL this had happened with amazing rapidity, and a moment later Frisco Jim was running diagonally across the street, his still smoking revolver in his hand.

Just as the murderous wretch reached the opposite sidewalk, the door of Dave Westlock's opium joint opened and Cool Hand Charley stepped out.

With two bounds, Frisco Jim leaped up the steps, caught hold of the Cool Hand and thrust him back through the half-open door, following instantly.

Then the door closed with a slam.

Manton had followed Frisco Jim instantly, but the door closed in his face.

Immediately the detective placed a whistle to his lips and sounded a call that he knew would bring policemen to his aid. He did not intend to let Frisco Jim escape from the trap into which he had unwittingly fled.

In a few moments two policemen came running up, and they were soon made acquainted with the situation. While one of them thundered at the front door and demanded admittance, the other ran around to watch the back side of the house.

Manton retreated across the street to where some men had lifted Frank Howland and placed him on his feet.

Baltimore Ben had vanished, but Fancy Flo was still standing close at hand, looking like a person dazed and at a loss to action.

"How bad are you hurt, Frank?" Deadsure asked, peering anxiously into the pale face of the unlucky young man.

"I don't know," was the reply. "Not bad, I think. It only seemed to take my wind and sting here in my side a little."

Manton told them to carry him into a drug-store and look after him, saying it was his duty to make sure Frisco Jim did not give them the slip.

He spoke not a word to Fancy Flo, although she seemed to stand waiting for his orders.

In the mean time, there was a scene of excitement and confusion within the opium joint.

"What the blazes are you up to, man?" demanded Cool Hand Charley, as the California crook thrust him back into the house and slammed the door.

"You must help me get away!" was the panted reply. "I have killed him, pard!"

"Killed who?"

"The man you call Old Deadsure."

"Bah!" was the retort. "You have done nothing of the kind! He was close at your heels when you came clipping across the street."

"Then I sunk my lead in the young fellow who was with him."

"And made a miserable mess of the whole affair! This is a pretty place to bore a man in broad daylight! Don't you know better than to try it? And then for you to run in here! Oh, you fool!"

Frisco Jim fell back a step, a maniacal light blazing in his eyes.

"You say this! You turn on me now! Do you know me? I am Frisco Jim, and this is not the first man I have killed!"

"If I am not mistaken, it will be your last. They will root you out of here in short order."

"I thought you were a man to stand by a pard! Is this the way you turn?"

"Pard! You're no pard of mine!"

Cool Hand Charley was no fool to put his own head in a trap when such a thing was not necessary.

The mad light deepened in the eyes of Frisco Jim.

The two men stood and looked at each other some moments, and then came a knocking on the door.

Charley lifted his hand as if to open.

Frisco Jim lifted the hand that held the deadly revolver.

"If you touch that door I'll bore ye!" he

said, and there was a deadly ring in his voice.

Charley paused, hesitated, measured the distance between them with his eye, crouched quickly and leaped at the throat of the man from California.

It was a deadly grapple.

The Cool Hand was a muscular fellow, but the strength of madness seemed to possess Frisco Jim. Charley was lifted and dashed to the floor, where he lay stunned.

Frisco Jim snarled and seemed on the point of filling the fallen man with bullets, but suddenly changed his mind and went leaping up the stairs, taking four at a jump.

The door at the head of the flight suddenly opened and Walt Fielding stepped out, his attention having been attracted by the sound of the struggle in the hall.

He was just in time to meet Jim, and the next instant Fielding was caught in the clutch of the maddened Westerner.

The struggle was brief, and then Walt was hurled headlong down the stairs, striking on Cool Hand Charley, who was just rising to his feet.

Down both went.

And now Frisco Jim seemed a maniac indeed! A wild laugh pealed from his lips as he saw what he had done, then he wheeled and leaped through the open door, slamming it behind him.

It closed with a click.

He was in the prison chamber!

Before him cowered Doris, who had been waiting the return of Old Deadsure.

Astounded by the presence of the girl, Jim retreated against the hidden door, passing his hand over his forehead in a dazed manner. For a long time he leaned there, staring hard at her, and then he shook his head and produced a revolver.

"Put down that weapon, or I shoot!"

He did not obey. Instead of that, he laughed, and there was something in the sound that made her shudder.

She could not force herself to press the trigger, even though she had threatened and believed her life in deadly peril. She retreated to the bed, where she stood trembling, resolved to shoot if forced to so terrible a thing.

As for the man, he paid no further attention to her. Only a few moments before Fielding had opened the iron shutters of the windows for her, so she might get a bit of daylight, and now her murderous-appearing companion approached one of the windows.

Like a cat he crept across the room, the revolver gripped his hand.

"Take me, will they?" he snarled. "Well, I'll make it cost them dear!"

He reached the window and peered forth. Then he lifted the revolver and sent two bullets into the street.

The two reports stunned and shocked Doris, and the powder smoke surrounded the fierce man with the revolver.

Frisco Jim seemed suddenly turned into a maniac. He danced and yelled, flourishing the revolver in the midst of the cloud of smoke. At length, he leaped to the window again, sending another bullet into the street, shouting through the glass.

"Let them come and take me!" he screamed. "I will give them a warm reception! They will find me right here! I am Satan turned loose! I am all the devil there was in a good man! Let them come up and take a devil!"

Doris was nearly swooning with horror, and still she held to that revolver with a tenacious clutch, not knowing what moment she might be forced to use it in self-defense.

He looked around for the door, but did not find it.

"Ten thousand furies!" he snarled. "What is this—a trap? Have they snared me here?"

Madly he sought for the door, but in vain.

"Well," he said, as he fell back from the wall and stood in the center of the room, "I am trapped; but I'll make them wade through blood before they get at me!"

Then he leaped back to the window, crashed the muzzle of his revolver through the glass and sent another bullet into the street.

He seemed utterly unconscious of the presence of another person in the chamber.

For a long time Frisco Jim tore about in fury, uttering horrible threats and adding to the girl's fear in other ways. At length,

however, he gradually grew calmer, as if the spell were passing from him.

Finally, he took a chair and drew it into the corner near the door, where he sat down, his manner entirely altered and his revolver lying forgotten on the floor. For ten minutes he sat with his head in his hands.

Then voices were heard outside.

"Here is the door," said one, and a hand struck against the wall close to where he sat.

Instantly he leaped up, grasped the sofa and placed it against the hidden door, the position of which had been revealed to him by the person outside. He arranged it like a prop, and then he sat down in the chair once more.

Then came a knocking on the door and a voice demanding admittance.

To this Frisco Jim paid not the least heed, but, taking a paper-bound book from his pocket, he sat there in the chair, reading aloud in a monotonous tone of voice.

Again and again was admittance demanded. The door was tried, but the sofa held it fast. Then came the sound of heavy blows breaking down the door.

Still Frisco Jim read on, as if nothing were happening.

Outside the room there was a scene of great excitement. As soon as he could, Cool Hand Charley had admitted the police to the house, Old Deadsure being among the first to enter.

Both Cool Hand and Walt Fielding were severely injured, the latter being in an unconscious condition.

As soon as he got inside, Manton took good care to secure the two plotters, knowing they would be needed later and feeling there was danger of their making a sudden disappearance.

Great was the detective's consternation when he learned Frisco Jim was in the room with Doris.

"We must get in there at once!" he cried. "That man is mad, and he will surely injure the girl!"

To his amazement, Frank Howland appeared.

"I thought you were shot," said Manton.

"Only a scratch," was the reply. "The bullet glanced on a coin in my pocket and cut a furrow in my side, but that is of no consequence."

Cool Hand Charley led the way up the stairs, seeming determined to do something to set himself right in the eyes of the police. Westlock was there, but he appeared like one dazed. The woman supposed to be his wife kept to her room. By a rare chance, no smokers were in the place; and they would have received very little attention had they been there."

They tried to open the door to the chamber, but found it immovable.

Frisco Jim had ceased his screeching and was no longer shooting into the street.

Frank Howland was frantic with fear, for he knew not what had taken place in that room, and the silence was appalling.

An ax was brought, and Old Deadsure grasped it. Crash, crash, crash! His blows fell on the door, which shivered and splintered before him.

Still no sound came from within the prison chamber.

At length, with a great noise, the door went down. They crowded in, finding a man lying beneath the wreck, which had fallen on his head, while a swooning girl crouched in the corner.

In the hands of the stunned and bleeding man beneath the shattered door a paper-covered book was grasped.

It was "The strange case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

A false beard had been torn from the man's face, and, peering into the exposed countenance, Manton Burke cried:

"I have found the missing man!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MCGATH'S METAMORPHOSIS.

FRANK HOWLAND saw nothing but Doris. Forgetting his injury, he sprung over the debris of the door and the motionless man beneath and caught the girl to his breast.

She did not repulse him then, but clung there, fainting with joy.

In the mean time, Manton Burke had knelt

beside the unconscious man, making a hasty examination. He discovered that "Frisco Jim" had been most skillfully disguised, and, in truth, he was not at all the person he had seemed.

The huge black beard being removed, the face it had concealed was that of a mild-appearing gentleman, who in no way seemed like the desperado who had created such terrific excitement on Thirteenth street.

Suddenly Doris caught a glimpse of the man's face, and a wild cry broke from her lips.

"Father—my father!"

She sprung forward, dropped on her knees and gathered his head in her lap, wildly kissing his face.

The missing Roscoe Venton was indeed found!

Baltimore Ben McGath was suddenly sobered by the mad and foolish act of his companion, and realizing what had happened, he lost not an instant in making himself missing.

Like a deer the frightened crook sped through an alley, reached Twelfth street, walked leisurely along toward Sixth avenue, turned down beneath the rumbling overhead trains and disappeared in the throng near Jefferson Market.

An hour later he was in the shop of a cunning-faced old Jew, away down in the slums.

"I want a disguise, Moses," said the crook—"one that will fix me so my mother would not know me if we met."

"Very well, mine friend," replied the old fox, rubbing his hands together. "I haf der very ting you vants. Shoost step indo der pack schops. Repecca, Repecca, come here and mindt der store vor a v'ile."

His wife took his place, and he conducted McGath to a part of the shop in which the crook had been more than once.

"Vat vor you vant some disguise?" asked old Moses.

"That's none of your business!" was the sharp retort. "You ought to know me well enough not to ask questions, uncle. I pay you well, don't I?"

"Very well, very well! I only wanted to know so I mighdt the petter get you the rig out vat you needed."

"Never you mind that, Moses; I will know what I need when I see it."

"How would you like to be Chinaman?"

"Excuse me!"

"Irish!"

"No."

"Vell, here is a fine rig vat makes you a Tago."

"I can't handle the Dago dialect, so I would be sure to give myself dead away."

"Vell, tell me der kindt of a feet you vants."

"Something that will let me talk in a natural manner."

The old Jew took down from a shelf some beards and wigs, from which he selected one of gray hair.

"Dis vill make you look like a very shorty oldt gent."

"Then that may be the ticker," nodded Ben. "Let me try it on."

With skillful fingers, Old Moses arranged the beard and wig, at the same time explaining:

"Dish ish very vine, for I make him vit the face like it crowed there. Dere vas a badent on dis beardt vat makes it somewat more ogspensive as some, bud so hellup me shimmery cracious you look vine in dot. Ven I put some lines in your vace und make it look oldter, id vill pe nature idself."

McGath viewed himself critically in a mirror.

"I believe this will do," he nodded. "I wonder if you have clothes to go with this?"

"I haf everyting."

"But I must have a swell rig, for I am going to play the old sport."

"If I don'd haf him, I send oudt und git id to your measure."

"Good! Tackle my face and see what you can do with it. Show your skill, Moses, and I will pay you well."

Nearly tw' hours later, a fine-looking, elegantly-dressed old gentleman walked out of the Jew's shop. His gray beard had the proper aristocratic cut, and the gold-rimmed nose-glasses he wore hid the color of his eyes.

He was dressed in broadcloth, and it seemed as if his slightly portly body had been made for the clothes, rather than the reverse. A shiny silk tie of the very latest design sat on his head, a diamond flashed in his immaculate shirt-bosom, and a massive gold chain was strung across his vest. On the little finger of his hand was a handsome seal ring, and he handled his cane with the air of a man accustomed to carrying a stick.

Within the little shop, Old Moses was rubbing his hands together and beaming through the glass, as he regarded the person who had just left his presence.

"Shimminy jewsharps!" he croaked through his mighty nose. "Vill you look at dot, Repecca! Dit you ever see sooch a vine shentlemans! Dot vas a driumph uf art! So hellup me, I didn't know I hat such a sblendid rig in my store! Und dot vas derpest day's vork I haf done in dree weeks. He don't peat me town no more than von-haluf vat I ask ad der virst, und den I makes two hundredt ber cendt clear brofit! Oh, Repecca! vat luck, vat luck!"

Baltimore Ben did not look much like himself, and that was an actual fact. He purchased a paper from a boy, took an up-town car and serenely read the news until he reached Twenty-third street. Here he got out and sauntered up Broadway to the Brower House, which was the resort of sporting men of all types.

Ben secured a room there and registered as "Titus M. Jones, Lexington, Ky." Then he had a square meal in the dining-room. Feeling very comfortable and serene, he lighted his cigar and sauntered out.

At the corner, on Broadway, just as the street lamps were beginning to twinkle that evening, he encountered a man who had often served him as a tool. This fellow was called Sandy Mullen, and he was a gambler of the most reckless and dangerous sort.

Mullen fancied he knew McGath.

"Hello, old boy!" he cried, slapping the Baltimore crook familiarly on the shoulder. "How goes it since we bucked the tiger in Dallas?"

Ben saw the other had been drinking.

"I beg your pardon," he said, quietly. "I think you have made a mistake."

"Hey? Mistake? Hain't you Jim Allen, the Twister?"

"No, sir."

"By Jove! I've made a mistake! But you look like him, hanged if you don't. Who are you?"

"Titus Jones, of Kentucky."

"That settles it. You'll drink with me, for I apologize."

"No Kentucky gentleman ever refuses to accept an apology and an offer to drink. Where shall we irrigate?"

"In the Coleman."

So they entered the Coleman House together. Ben saw Mullen was already pretty full, and he noticed his former pal seemed flush with money.

"Been hitting the beast lately?" he ventured to inquire.

"Right between the eyes!" enthusiastically retorted Sandy. "I got at the tiger in great shape."

"Good haul?"

"Seven thousand dollars."

"That was not bad, but it might have been better."

"That's the way I figure it, and I'm going to make it better this night—or drop the wad."

"I am a stranger in this city," lied McGath. "Have been thinking I wouldn't mind sitting into a little session, but I don't know where to strike the animal."

"Come with me, old man. I can put you on. What are you looking for—faro?"

"Oh, 'most anything."

Ben was lying still, for he had no desire to run up against a bank. Instead, he was looking for Sandy Mullen's seven thousand.

His cash was so low he could not skip the town in the manner he would like, and he wanted to get enough to enable him to leave New York right away. He had taken a fancy that everything was going wrong, and he it knew it was best to stand from under when the crash came.

The conscience of the Baltimore crook did not trouble him, and he was quite ready to suck Sandy Mullen dry, even though Mullen had done him more than one good turn.

The two men drank together for some time, and Sandy was in just the right condition for plucking. He fancied he was going to make something out of the stranger he had accidentally encountered, and this caused him to drop his own guard entirely.

It was ten o'clock when the two men made their way to Sixth avenue and gave the watcher the wink at Munson's dark little door. This sentinel did not appear to notice them at all, and they passed in. No one would have thought the man was on guard, for he seemed to be carelessly lounging in front of the door, smoking a black cigar and watching the passing throng. In fact, he was posted there to give warning of a sudden police raid. If the officers were not pretty cute in coming down on the place, a significant whistle from the guard would send the alarm up to the room over the saloon and cigar store, and when the police entered, they would find the place dark and deserted. The gamblers would have vanished, likewise all the outfit of their crooked profession.

Within the outer door, Sandy Mullen rapped on another. Back shot a little slide, and a man peered out through the opening.

"All right, Ted," assured Mullen.

Click! the door opened before them.

Up the stairs they went, turned to the left, passed along a hall, pushed open another door, and boldly entered a lighted and carpeted room.

The whirr of roulette balls, rattle of chips and ripple of cards came to their ears. The gambling-den was in full blast at that early hour. Elegantly-dressed men were there, but they spoke in low tones, and their feet made no sounds on the soft carpet.

Neither Mullen nor McGath noticed a man who came in close behind them and sauntered leisurely to a small table beneath a corner gas-jet.

Baltimore Ben was ready with his excuses for not entering any of the games in progress. The faro-table was too crowded, the man with the red necktie would hoodoo him at the roulette, he only shook dice on Mondays and Saturdays.

"Well, what in blazes will you do?" inquired Sandy, in poorly concealed disgust. "I thought I had run up against a sport!"

McGath turned squarely on his heels.

"Perhaps you have made no mistake," he icily observed. "If you think I am no sport, just try me a turn at poker."

"I'm with you!" laughed Mullen. "Poker is my pudding! I'll bu'st you wide!"

"Look out for yourself. You are welcome to my money—if you win it."

Ben did not confess he only had about fifty dollars left in his pocket.

They looked around for a table, and the only one handy was a corner one, directly beneath a gas-jet, and at that a man who wore spectacles sat writing.

"We'll have to nudge him," said Ben.

"Sure," nodded Sandy.

They went over, and McGath touched the stranger on the shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, but we wish to engage in a little game of draw, and this is the only table available. We dislike to disturb you, but—"

"Don't mention it!" cheerfully returned the man, putting aside his writing. "I won't kick, if you'll let me in on the ground floor. I sometimes monkey with chip-chip myself. Anything under a sky limit will suit me, and if you get my needful, you'll have to hold better cards. I never take a bluff. Do I get in?"

McGath and Mullen looked at each other, nodded, and then said in the same breath:

"You do."

CHAPTER XXXV.

EXIT MCGATH.

THE stranger was a middle-aged man of comfortable appearance. His eyes must have troubled him, for the spectacles were plainly designed to relieve them from strong lights. His handsome brown beard was carefully trimmed and parted in the middle.

Sandy Mullen had a "big brace on" to keep from showing the effect of the liquor he had swallowed, and he was not really in condition to play poker or anything else.

But he didn't know it, and he might have played just the same if he had, for he was a bull-headed rascal.

They sat around the table. Cards were called for and rippled. The deal fell to the stranger.

"My name is Snodley," he observed, by way of introduction. "I never resort to the vulgar practice of pulling a gun unless I really mean to use it."

Sandy growled.

"We are gentlemen," he asserted.

"I am Titus M. Jones, of Kentucky," explained Baltimore Ben, falling into the stranger's mood. "What kind of a gun do you find the most effective? I always carry a pair of thirty-eight Smith & Wesson's."

"Mine is a bull-dog."

"Excuse me. I fancied you might be a Western man, but no Westerner ever sacks around a bull-dog. The things are heavy as small cannons, and you can't be dead sure of hitting a house with them unless you can touch the building with the muzzle when you pull the trigger."

"I'll take my chances with your Smith & Wessons."

After this exchange of pleasantries, the limit was agreed upon and the cards tossed around. The game ran pretty level at the start, but Sandy Mullen would have more liquor, and he got in a bad way. It was not long before he was making terrible scaly bluffs, and the way Baltimore Ben raked his money in was a caution: Snodley did not seem to win much or lose much.

While the other two were intent upon their cards, they did not observe how closely they were being scrutinized by Snodley. That queer individual was peeping through his spectacles at first one and then the other, but after a few seconds, he gave the most of his attention to Mullen Baltimore Ben.

Sandy Mullen grew sullen. The liquor and his losses were making him dangerous. He saw his seven thousand melting away, and no matter how good his cards were, the disguised Baltimore crook held some just a little better.

In his heart, Ben was laughing with triumph. The evening papers had given an account of the affair on Thirteenth street, adding that the police were on the watch for Ben McGath.

"Let them catch me when I have sucked Sandy Mullen dry!" he silently laughed. "With that money, I can snap my fingers in their faces. Cool Hand will never blow, but they have him tight and fast, and I must look out for myself. I'll vanish from New York most mysteriously."

He really did not know how difficult it would be to give Old Deadsure the slip. Manton Burke was as relentless as fate when once he set out to run a criminal down.

"Curse the luck!" fumed Sandy Mullen, as he had a good full house beaten by four sixes. "Let's have another pack!"

Another pack was brought, but still luck ran against Mullen. He began to grow suspicious, and he watched to see if any signs passed between his two companions.

Finally Sandy held up four kings pat. He run his last dollar on the board and saw Baltimore Ben take the pile with four aces. For some moments, Sandy sat there dazed, but he muttered at length:

"Bu'sted—cleaned out!"

"You don't mean it?"

Baltimore Ben's pretended surprise and compassion aroused the unlucky gambler's resentment.

"I do mean it, and I reckon I have been played for a sucker."

"What's that?"

"You two were in the job together."

"I protest you are quite wrong," calmly said Snodley. "Mr. Jones is quite a stranger to me."

"Bah!" snarled Mullen. "That don't go! You couldn't have done it if I hadn't been duped! I know the tricks too well; but the infernal drink is in my head. That's the way you downed me! But, I'll even up! I'll lick both of ye!"

He half-rose to his feet, but Snodley sat quietly in his place.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," advised the stranger.

With a howl, Mullen lunged across the table, and the blow tore Snodley's spectacles from his eyes.

Baltimore Ben saw the eyes thus exposed, and a yell of dismay broke from his lips.

"Old Burke, or I'm a fool!"

"Yes, Old Burke I am!" was the instant retort, as the detective, betrayed by his eyes, attempted to spring to his feet and grapple with the crook he wanted.

Up to that moment the Madison Square Detective had not been certain the portly sport was his game, even though he had followed him into the gambling-hell to discover the truth.

Like a flash, McGath slipped the cards he held fairly into the detective's eyes.

That gave him a moment, and he leaped away, just escaping Old Deadsure's clutch.

"Stop!"

Ben did not heed the command. Gambling in that room had suddenly ceased, and every eye was turned toward the strange scene that was being enacted.

Quick as thought the Baltimore crook darted across the room and flung open a window.

Manton was hot after him, and Ben found himself looking down into the yard far beneath. It was at the back of the building, and there was no passing below.

To leap meant broken bones and possible death.

Was there no escape?

All at once he straightened up on the sill and launched himself into space, vanishing from view.

A cry of horror came from the lips of the spectators, for they thought he must go down into the yard and be dashed to death.

Ben had jumped just in time to escape the hands of the pursuing detective, and Manton saw he had not taken a headlong plunge into the yard. Indeed, the slippery crook had caught hold of a telephone wire and was swinging across to a building opposite.

The wire must have cut McGath's hands, but he was gritty, and he kept moving. When he was about half way across, he flung his legs up over the wire and rested a moment.

Then he went on again.

"He is getting away with all my money!" snarled Sandy Mullen.

"Who is he?" asked one of the gamblers.

"Ben McGath," replied Manton Burke; "and he's my game!"

Down the stairs shot Old Deadsure, intending to head the escaping crook off. He was much chagrined to think Ben had twice evaded his closing fingers, but he could not help admiring the dare-devil in the fellow that led him to trust his life on the slender telephone wire.

He lost not a moment's time in getting around to head Ben off, but when he came to a point where he could see the wire once more, McGath had vanished.

And he was not to be found by the detective that night.

It is barely possible Ben might have been able to escape from the city had he not made a furious foe of Sandy Mullen.

"To think he'd play that low down racket on me!" hissed Sandy. "We had stood in as pals many's the time. And now he rigs himself and swipes my stuff by dirty deals! Just wait till I find him! He won't escape me!"

He didn't. Sandy found him late that night. They met in a low West Side dive, where Ben had taken refuge. A fight followed, and Mullen gave Ben the length of a knife.

It was necessary to call up an ambulance, and the surgeon declared there was no chance as soon as he had examined the cut.

Lying in a hospital cot, Ben signified a desire to make a confession. But when the proper parties appeared, he had only enough strength remaining to gasp:

"It was an accident! Charley and I did it—in Madison Square! Tom Buck—we killed him! He—Ah!"

His lips were silent forever!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALL EXPLAINED.

Old Deadsure and Cool Hand Charley sat looking at each other across a narrow table. There were irons on the crook's wrists, but his face wore a look of defiance—a look that was a smile.

There were others in the room, and all were anxiously watching and listening.

"Come, Roberts," spoke the detective, "you may as well make a clean breast of it."

The smile on the crook's face became a sneer.

"You can't work me, Manton Burke," he declared. "You ought to know that."

"You won't confess?"

"Not any."

"Your pal has peached."

"Who?"

"McGath."

"I know better."

"I give you my word it is true, and you know I would not lie even to get a confession from you."

"Ben is not the man to blow."

"He told the truth with his last breath."

"What?"

"He is dead."

The Cool Hand fell back in his chair, the smile fading from his lips for an instant.

"Is this on the level?" he asked.

"It is."

"How did it happen?"

"He was knifed in Clancy's Dive. Sandy Mullen stuck him deep. He choked in Bellevue two hours ago."

Charley was silent for some time, and then his lips closed tightly an instant, a set look resting on his face.

"I don't care—not a word do you get out of me," he said.

"We'll see about that," was the retort, as Manton leaned forward and fixed his dark eyes on those of the man opposite. "Look at me," although resisting with all his strength, Cool Hand Charley was forced to obey. For some seconds the two men sat like marble images, and then the crook's arm fell by his side, a dazed look entering his eyes.

Now," said Deadsure, commandingly, "you will answer all my questions promptly and truthfully. To begin with, did Tom Buck die in Arizona?"

"He did not."

"How was that?"

"A man who looked much like him was killed there, and Buck put up a trick to deceive the detective who was dogging him."

"Where is Buck now?"

"In New York's Potter's Field."

"Dead?"

"Of course."

"How long ago did he die?"

"A few days."

"Where has he been ever since he was supposed killed in Arizona?"

"Living in the West under a false name."

"For what purpose?"

"So he might be forgotten in the East."

"He finally came East?"

"Yes."

"Did he communicate with you before coming?"

"No."

"With McGath?"

"Yes."

"How did McGath reply?"

"By telegram."

"In which he said what?"

"That he would meet Buck, as agreed, and that there was no danger, as Buck was forgotten. They had made some kind of a bargain; I don't know what it was."

"Where did they meet?"

"In an East Side saloon, but Ben did not know Buck."

"Why not?"

"Buck had succeeded in entirely altering his looks."

"How?"

"By having his ugly teeth extracted and some good-looking false ones made for him, and by having an operation performed on his nose."

"What kind of an operation?"

"His nose had been broken and was in bad shape. A skillful surgeon corrected its deformity until it looked as well as any man's nose."

"Did you accompany McGath when he went to meet Buck?"

"Yes."

"How did Buck appear?"

"He was drunk as a lord. On the train he had met a bloke who was a little daft, but had lots of scads. Buck coddled him. This man declared he was a second Mr. Hyde, and he said Mr. Hyde was real bad. Tom made him believe he was as bad as he

fancied himself. They went to the East Side saloon together, and there Tom drank him full, though it took a flood to do it. They had a private room, and Buck took the stranger's clothes, money and everything. The clothes fitted Tom, and he put them on. Then he got generous and left a twenty dollar bill for the poor devil he had skinned. Tom was drinking in the saloon below when we met him, and he told us of his luck. We made a hustle to get him away."

"Where did you take him?"

"We started to take him to the Brower House, but we only got him as far as Madison Square."

"What happened there?"

"He took a slump on one of the benches, and we couldn't get him further unless we lugged him. Then McGath gave him a taste of the machine."

"What machine?"

"The one I stole from the old man called Professor Crank. It was some kind of an electric arrangement. We thought it would give Tom a shock that would brace him up."

"What happened?"

"He cried out when we made him grasp the handles, twisted and fell back dead! Then the rain came down. We were frightened and we skipped lively, leaving him there under the trees."

The mystery of the death in Madison Square was solved.

For many months Roscoe Venton had been mildly insane. He had brooded over the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde until he came to believe it quite possible for a man to take some kind of a powder that would change his personality and nature completely. At length, he fancied he had struck the secret, and one day he really believed he had taken the powder and was no longer Roscoe Venton, but was a second Mr. Hyde.

Then he started for New York.

On his way he fell in with Tom Buck, and the reader knows what came of the meeting.

When Venton awoke in the saloon and found himself attired in clothes that were not his own and with only twenty dollars of his money remaining, he was convinced that his identity had changed. But when he looked into a mirror, he was disgusted to discover how like his old self he appeared. Straightway he had his beard shaved off and disguised himself as he appeared when known as Frisco Jim. His madness only assumed a very violent aspect after he had attempted to take Manton's life in Thirteenth street.

The falling of the door on his head rendered him unconscious for a time, and when he revived he had not the slightest recollection of the events that had taken place since he left Buffalo many days before.

Some months have passed since the events of this story took place.

Roscoe Venton has been treated by a skillful physician and pronounced quite sane, no trace of his malady appearing since the door fell on his head.

Doris learned from Fancy Flo's lips the truth about Frank Howland, and she declared she would never doubt him again. They are married, for Roscoe Venton no longer opposed the union.

Walt Fielding's schemes came to naught, and he thought it best to take himself off, which he did, much to the relief of Doris.

An old charge was pressed against Cool Hand Charley, and the nervy crook is now "doing time."

Westlock's joint was broken up.

Professor Crank did not live to perfect his great invention. His dead body was found in a wretched room one morning, and his fingers grasped the handles of a little box, from which came a soft whirring sound. The parent of the infernal machine was its last victim.

Jack Cable resigned from the police force, by request.

Manton Burke—"Old Deadsure"—is still in New York, but it is impossible to say if he will ever take hold of another case. If he strikes some baffling mystery, the detective instinct may be so aroused within him that he will not rest till he has followed the last clue to—

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